

The works of
VICENTE BLASCO IBANEZ

Sonnica
The Intruder
The Four Horsemen of the
Apocalypse
Blood and Sand
Dead Command
La Corrida
The Enemies of Women
La Bodega (The Fruit of the Vine)
Mare Nostrum (Our Sea)
The Mayflower
Mexico in Revolution
The Shadow of the Cathedral
The Torrent
Woman Triumphant
The Temptress
In the Land of Art
Queen Calafia
Alfonso XIII Unmasked
The Old Woman of the Movies
and other Stories
A Novelist's Tour of the World
The Pope of the Sea
etc.

AT THE FEET OF VENUS

A Tale of the Borgias

By

VICENTE BLASCO IBÁÑEZ

SECOND IMPRESSION



SKEFFINGTON & SON, LTD.
34, PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON, E.C.4

or were running through the streets crying, "Death to the Catalans!" he was busy electing a new Pope from among his friends.

The Sienese Prince Piccolomini, who took the name of Aeneas Silvius, in accord with a fashion that had come into vogue with Humanism, had always been a writer, whatever the post he chanced to occupy. His light, gentle, agreeable, fickle character seemed to be a reflection of his literary style. As a young man, at the time of the Council of Basel, he had shifted about between Pope and Anti-Pope according to the prospects of the moment. Like most literary men of his time, he had led a life of well-mannered licence, recognizing two children of an English lady who had lived with him, while his enemies credited him with other numerous offspring he never acknowledged. He was the author of tales, poems, and scientific treatises, composed in accord with the tastes of his day. A manual of geography, which he left incomplete, described the world as it was known in his time, especially the continent of Asia. Thirty years later it was to appear, along with a geographical encyclopædia composed a century earlier by Cardinal Pierre d'Ailly, in the tiny scientific library used by a dreamer named Christopher Columbus. Aeneas Silvius enjoyed Nature as much as Petrarch ever did. He styled himself "the Forest-Lover", and during his reign as Pope he fled the pontifical palaces as often as he could, to take refuge in some leafy bower in Umbria shaded by age-old ilex trees.

Though Calixtus the Third had little time, in the midst of all his wars with the Turks, to foster arts and letters, he deigned to notice Piccolomini, and opened the most exalted portal in the Church to him when, twenty months before his death, he made him a Cardinal. At the opening of the Conclave Piccolomini was the newest arrival in the College, but he had his literary popularity in his favour. At that moment the subtle Rodrigo de Borja was only twenty-six years old, but, with a boldness characteristic of his energetic youth, he determined that Aeneas Silvius should be Pope. The Sienese Cardinal could be counted virtually as one of the Borgias. He had been at great pains to show his gratitude and make himself agreeable to his patron, Calixtus the Third. Rodrigo did not give the Cardinals time to organize into their favourite

cliques, each supporting a particular candidate. The moment the Conclave assembled, he anticipated all counter-moves by proposing that Piccolomini be named Pope by acclamation. His Mediterranean eloquence, coupled with the suddenness of his attack, swept the ground before him. The new Pope took the name of Pius the Second, and Borgia continued to fill his post as Vice-Chancellor.

At the age of fifty-three Pius the Second was ready to call quits with frivolities and begin living as befitted his new title. His health was seriously shattered, especially by a tenacious gout which he had earned in Scotland on a long march, barefoot, through the snow to a church dedicated to the Virgin. This was in fulfilment of a vow he had made during a storm at sea. Confined to his bed over long periods of time, he could attend only occasionally to the affairs of his high office and to the continuation of his book on "Things Memorable", to which he was consigning everything of interest he had heard or seen during his many travels.

A short, chubby man with white hair, Pope Pius the Second gave an impression of mingled severity and gentleness. In days gone by he had set the pace for sumptuous living among the Cardinals. Now he dressed very modestly, and his table was an exemplar of apostolic frugality. Is spite of his physical condition he made frequent journeys to satisfy his joys in the beauties of Nature—the sole pleasures that were still within his reach. During his vacations in Umbria he would hold audiences and sign documents in the open air in the midst of the groves he loved. Disinclined by temperament to violence, Pius had nevertheless to deal with one of the most terrible captains of the time, Sigismondo Malatesta, a man as fierce as a bear in his moments of anger, though at other times he could be an artist of most fastidious sensibilities. This cruel bandit served the Popes, or made light of them, according as his interests as Lord of Rimini seemed to dictate. Malatesta concluded that Piccolomini was a weak, peace-loving man, and set out to despoil the Church of part of her territories. But the sometime novelist finally took up the gauntlet. Malatesta's acts of sacrilege gave the war, which was to end in his ruin, the appearance of a small-sized crusade. For one thing the Lord of Rimini had put many priests and friars to death,

but he had also given a pagan goddess a shrine in a Christian church; and during an orgy one night he had the holy water in the founts of the churches in his capital filled with ink, so that worshippers who came to Mass the following day had to listen to it with smudged faces.

During the pontificate of Pius the Second nepotism and local favouritism flourished as they had under Calixtus the Third. Thousands of people came hurrying from Siena to Rome to seek office under their fellow-townsman, just as the Catalans had done during the reign of the first Borgia. Any-one who held, or who could adopt, the name of Piccolomini, thought himself entitled thereby to some rich benefice in the Church. Numerous nephews of the Pope came to occupy high secular charges. Everything, in short, that had occurred during the preceding pontificates was repeated now, just as it was to be repeated under succeeding Popes, and the Roman mob was denouncing the Sienese, who had now shouldered the odium formerly bestowed upon the Catalans. Pius the Second savoured the satisfaction of his defeat of Malatesta, a terror to Popes and princes alike, by going off whenever possible to the Alban hills and settling on the wooded shores of Lake Albano or of the Lake of Nemi, among countless memories of Antiquity, waiting for goddesses and nymphs to appear amid the leafy bowers and finding Diana in person in every sylvan grotto.

During the course of his reign of six years Pius made a disastrous attempt to imitate the Crusade against the Turks organized by the first Borgia. The fanatical Spaniard, Juan de Carvajal, the same who had figured in the "Battle of the Three Johns", was now an old man, but he was the moving force in this new Crusade, which mobilized at Ancona. The crusaders were in large part Frenchmen and Spaniards. While waiting at Ancona for the arrival of the fleet that was to carry them to the Levant, they killed each other right and left in continuous quarrels. It was at Ancona that the Pope died, vainly waiting for ships and money, looking out sadly from his bedroom window upon the few boats he had managed to assemble, and upon the ill-equipped and disorderly crowds of adventurers whom he could never hope to discipline into an army.

When the news of Piccolomini's death reached Rome the same rioting that had marked the passing of his predecessor drenched the city in blood. The populace ran the streets crying, "Death to the Sienese!" and killing such luckless individuals as came in its way. At the moment Antonio Piccolomini, Duke of Amalfi, the favourite nephew of Pius the Second, was holding the Castle of Sant' Angelo, as Pedro Luis de Borja had done under Calixtus the Third.

When the Conclave opened one party was in favour of recognizing the tireless and virtuous Carvajal. Another group was supporting the aged Cardinal Torquemada, also a Spaniard of spotless reputation, who was furthermore regarded as the leading theologian of his day. But these two candidates were eliminated on grounds of nationality. Besides, Rodrigo de Borja, a skilful and tireless agitator, held a powerful clique of Cardinals under his thumb and had decided to name a Pope of his own choice. Cardinal Barbo, a wealthy Venetian patrician, was deeply attached to the Borgias. It was he who, in company with Rodrigo, had courageously faced the wrath of the Orsinis during the escape of Don Pedro Luis. Cardinal Borgia took such interest in the election of his friend that he had himself carried to the Vatican while seriously ill of fever with his head buried in poultices and bandages. The plague was raging in the city, and many of the Cardinals chose to remain at home to escape the privations and the exposure they would have had to encounter in sitting at the Conclave. Rodrigo Borgia took advantage of their absence to bring about the triumph of his candidate.

Barbo was a handsome man, and knew it. He elected to call himself Formosus the First. To this the Cardinals objected, in fear of public ridicule; and they likewise vetoed the name of Mark, his second choice, since "San Marco" was the war-cry of his Venetian countrymen. Finally he fixed on the title of Paul the Second. Announcement of the election was followed by the pillaging and plundering inevitable at the end of every Conclave. Barbo and the warrior Cardinal Scarampo, former admiral to Calixtus the Third, anticipating the chance of their election, had protected their palaces with soldiers and artillery.

A first rumour spread that Scarampo had been chosen, and

the mob rushed upon his palace, only to be driven back. When the news came that Barbo had been victorious, there was an assault upon his luxurious dwelling, which was filled with numberless treasures of art. Received here as at the other place with artillery and musket-fire, but determined to find plunder somewhere, the rioters attacked the monastery of Santa Maria Nuovo, on the pretext that the Pope-elect had transferred his riches thither. That place, too, was found guarded by troops. Meantime the whole city had sprung to arms, and the mobs surged a second time upon Palazzo Barbo. Finally, the new Pope compromised with the leaders of the disturbance, paying them thirteen hundred ducats in gold as ransom for his residence. But such alms did not prevent the underlings at the Vatican from sacking the apartments occupied by Cardinal Barbo during the Conclave.

The life of a Roman pontiff at that time was filled with such episodes. Paul the Second had to pay over some thirty thousand ducats to the Duke of Amalfi before the latter would consent to vacate the Castle of Sant' Angelo and the fortress of Tivoli, Spoleto and Ostia, which his uncle, the late Pope, had entrusted to him. To avoid such blackmail in the future, Pope Barbo thought it best to have a man he could trust in the citadel which was the key to Rome; and at the suggestion of his friend Borgia he transferred the castle to the Spanish scholar, Rodrigo Sanchez de Arévalo, who was shortly to add a mitre to his title as Military Governor. Active and energetic as a Cardinal, Barbo seemed to be transformed by the high office he now attained. He showed himself a weak, lazy, and somewhat eccentric individual. He began to invert life about the Vatican, turning day into night, giving audiences at two or three o'clock in the morning, and keeping even his most intimate friends who were desirous of consulting him waiting for weeks and weeks in town.

Hygienic conditions in the city and in the marshy Campagna about prolonged the plague even into the winter months. Mortality attained terrifying figures. But that did not discourage the Roman populace from celebrating Carnival as the most important festival of the year. It was Paul the Second who arranged that the races and the processions of masks should no longer be confined to the Piazza del Campidoglio

but should deploy along the Via Flaminia, at that time the longest street in the city, which acquired from this new custom its present name as the Corso. He also introduced innovations into the Carnival programme itself, holding races between donkeys, boys, and especially Jews, these last proving most diverting to the barbarous multitudes.

Pope Barbo developed these festivals of Carnival largely as a means of distracting the Roman mob from revolutionary designs. During his reign a conspiracy was discovered which had as its objective the assassination of the Pontiff and the proclamation of a Roman republic. The plot was an affair of the Humanists, chief among them the celebrated Platina; but the most doughty, in energy and recklessness, was the poet Calimaco. The plan was secretly to readmit all proscribed to Rome and hide them in the ruins of a building which had been dismantled to provide materials for the Vatican. Then a fight would be picked in front of the palace with the lackeys who were waiting outside in attendance on the Cardinals, in order to attract the attention of the pontifical Guards. At this moment the conspirators would make their way into the Vatican and kill the Pope and everyone else they should come upon. The plot, however, very similar to Porcaro's venture some years before, chanced to be betrayed. Paul the Second launched terrible anathemas upon the so-called Academy of Rome, where the adepts of Humanism gathered—all of them "materialists and pagans", as he said, denying God, asserting that there was no world beyond this visible one, that the soul died with the body, and that a man might give himself over to all pleasures without fear of the divine commandments, so long as he avoided conflict with the criminal justice of the State. These men were Epicureans, followers of the doctrine expounded by Lorenzo Valla in his treatise on *Pleasure*. They ate meat on Fridays and fast days, and berated the priests of God as inventors of the fasts and of the prohibitions against the taking of more than one wife. They revived the teachings of the mysterious book called *The Three Impostors*, which had caused such a flurry in the Middle Ages by declaring that Moses had hoodwinked mankind with his laws, that Christ was a seducer of the peoples, and that Mahomet, though a man of greater wit,

was a charlatan as perfect as the other two. "They are ashamed of their Christian names," concluded the Pope, "preferring others drawn from the Pagans; and they indulge likewise in the most scandalous vices of Antiquity."

Calimaco and two other Humanists who were compromised with him succeeded in escaping from Rome, but the illustrious Platina suffered a long imprisonment in the Castle of Sant' Angelo. His jailer, the Spaniard Rodrigo Sanchez de Arévalo, Bishop of Calahorra, was likewise a scholar versed in classical letters. Many epistles in Latin passed between captain and prisoner, the correspondence resulting in a decreasing severity in the privations imposed upon the unfortunate scholar.

The one man of the Church who retained public respect was Carvajal, prematurely aged and his health broken by the hardships he had endured in Hungary in halting the advance of the Turks. He lived like a saint in a modest home, giving what money he had to the poor of Rome. The other Cardinals, coming from illustrious families or houses kindred to those of past Popes, spent the huge incomes they derived from the rich cures of Christianity in sumptuous living. One of the youngest, Rodrigo de Borja, took the lead in this respect over ecclesiasts older and far richer than he. Scarampo, famous for his connection with the crusade of Calixtus, was nicknamed "Cardinal Lucullus" because of the fantastic splendours of his table. While maintaining numerous residences and expensive mistresses, he was also supporting the celebrated painter Mantegna. Another patron of painting and sculpture was the French Cardinal Guillaume d'Estouteville, a man of incalculable wealth who also lived like a secular prince with numerous offspring about him, regardless of the scandal provoked by his licentious life. When these two magnates died, Rodrigo de Borja was left in unquestionable supremacy among the so-called secular princes of the Church.

Paul the Second died suddenly in 1471 from over-eating melons at the end of an open-air supper in the gardens of the Vatican at an early evening hour when, as people of that time thought, the air was polluted by deadly emanations from the marshes. Venetians had come into power with Barbo's pontificate, and the Romans abhorred them as cordially as they

had the Sienese and the Catalans. Again Rodrigo de Borja stood ready at the Conclave with an important following of wealthy, bold, and restless Cardinals devoted to worldly things. With the help of Cardinals Gonzaga and Orsini, men no better and no worse than he, he turned the election to a sometime Genoese friar, Cardinal Francesco della Rovere, who assumed the name of Sixtus the Fourth.

The first concern of the new Pope and the College was to ferret out the treasure which Paul the Second had assembled during his reign. Shortly before his death the late Pope had informed the Consistory that he had a half-million ducats at hand to make war on the Turks in case the princes of Christianity should make up their minds to support him. Gradually the nest-egg which the noctambulous Pontiff had hidden in different places came to light : fifty-four silver cups inlaid with pearls, large quantities of bullion, numbers of precious stones, and four collections of coin, the whole totalling more than four hundred thousand ducats. All these riches were at once transferred to the Castle of Sant' Angelo to be guarded by the Bishop of Calahorra.

Cardinal Borgia placed the tiara on the head of the new Pontiff with his own hands, and for the third time saw control of Church affairs resting firmly in his grasp. But though Borgia was appreciated at his true worth and favoured with rich benefices by Sixtus the Fourth, the latter could not resist the influence of his own relatives, who gathered about him in two equally rapacious groups, the Riarios, children of one of his sisters, and the Roveres.

At the head of the Roveres stood Giuliano, a cardinal of fiery, energetic disposition, the duplicate of Rodrigo Borgia both in character and ambitions, and, like Borgia, a Pope's nephew of luxurious inclinations. Close friends, at times, from congeniality of tastes, they were at others fiercest adversaries, pushing their mutual hatred to extremes. Giuliano della Rovere was to be an eternal thorn in the side of Alexander the Sixth, and actually won the tiara after Alexander's death to become Pope Julius the Second.

In reality Sixtus the Fourth showed less affection for Giuliano della Rovere than for another of his nephews, Pietro Riario, whom he made Cardinal at the age of twenty-five—

Giuliano did not receive his purple till past twenty-eight. Many contemporaries explained this preference (since Giuliano was the man of greater talent) on the supposition that Cardinal Riario was a son, and not a nephew, of Sixtus the Fourth. The Borgias, at any rate, never could match the magnificence of this Cardinal Riario, presumptive bastard of a Pope, who leapt in one bound from his status as a penniless friar to that of a spendthrift Cardinal. His uncle, or, if one prefer, his father, bestowed on him so many bishoprics, abbeys, and other opulent charges that his annual income exceeded three million francs in gold—though not even this prodigious fortune was adequate to meet his unbridled prodigality. He ate on gold plates and rode the most costly horses. His lackeys dressed in silk and purple. Wherever he went he was followed by a retinue of poets and painters. He regarded the management of his tourneys and the theatrical spectacles he held in his palaces and gardens as important matters of State. "He desired", said Platina the Humanist, of whom he became patron, and whom Sixtus the Fourth had made librarian of the Vatican, "to compete in grandeur and magnificence with the most famous men of old, and as well in evil as in good." This young man, who had been a Franciscan friar some months before, moved about his estates in garments of cloth-of-gold and "covered his mistresses with priceless pearls from head to foot".

Magnates passing through Rome, whether Christian kings driven from the East by the Turkish advance, or potentates of Western powers, could not conceal their amazement at the splendour with which Cardinal Riario paid homage to them. He would build wooden buildings from the ground up to shelter banquets that were to last only a few hours, and then tear them down again. Each course served at such feasts was announced by a herald who rode into the dining-room on horseback, each time in a different costume, followed by a company of musicians. On the occasion of a visit from a princess of the Aragonese dynasty ruling in Naples he offered a banquet which lasted six hours and comprised forty-four courses: stags, goats, rabbits, calves, roasted whole and served in their skins, and cranes, peacocks, pheasants, all with their plumage. The bread was covered with gold leaf, and

the fish, as well as other victuals, reached the table with coverings of silver. The biggest dish, which was brought on by a dozen servants dressed in silk, looked like a life-sized bear with a stake thrust into his mouth. The best sculptors in Rome had been called on to fashion the pastry. The twelve labours of Hercules, all the figures life-size, were represented in sugar-frostings.

Another course represented a mountain cave over which crawled a gigantic snake wriggling like a living reptile. Castles of pastry with banners flying passed the tables, to be thrown to the mobs outside the palace, which were serenading the tunes of the orchestras within. Ten ships made of nougat and other similar sweets sailed into the hall laden with acorns of sugar almonds (the acorn figured in the escutcheon of the Riarios). At the end of the feast came Venus drawn by swans in a chariot of mother-of-pearl; then a mountain, which was rent in twain to disclose a poet—and he stepped forward to express his admiration for the assembled guests in rhyme; and finally troupes of women dancing ancient dances approved by the tastes of the day as whetters of general concupiscence. In the three years of his cardinalate Riario spent a sum equivalent to six hundred thousand pounds, and left debts approximating one hundred and twenty thousand pounds. He died suddenly at the end of a drunken debauch which proved too much for his constitution. Sixtus the Fourth mourned him with a father's sorrow, pardoning his spendthrift licentiousness and lauding in him a young man worthy of his time, who had lived gloriously, favouring the arts and protecting painters, sculptors and architects. All the poets of Rome exalted him in their verses as a latter-day *Mæcenas*.

The death of Pietro Riario left a free field for the ambitions of his cousin, Giuliano della Rovere, who, moreover, was able to strengthen his influence among the so-called "secular" Cardinals because of the temporary absence from Rome of Rodrigo Borgia.

Sixtus the Fourth had conceived a plan for organizing a new crusade against the Turks, and sent legates to the principal Christian powers to solicit aid in the enterprise. Spain was assigned to Borgia, and he set out on his journey thither in May of the year 1472. This was to be his first visit to his home

since he departed from it in early boyhood, and he was never to see it again.

As the custom was, all the Cardinals resident in Rome escorted their colleague to the Gate of Saint Paul and gave him the kiss of farewell. In his suite came numbers of Italian bishops, clerics, lawyers, poets (these last his secretaries), and in addition two Neapolitan painters who ended by settling in Spain. He lingered several days at Ostia to await the abatement of a tempest, and finally set sail in two ships supplied by King don Ferrante of Naples. After a first stop at Corsica he made port at Valencia on the 17th of June.

At that moment Valencia was the richest city of the Spanish Mediterranean, as well as the gayest and most lively. John the Second, father of Ferdinand the Catholic, was deadlocked in an unending strife with the Catalans, and Barcelona refused to recognize his authority. All trade by sea, in consequence, passed to the Port of Valencia. From the time of Alfonso the Fifth this harbour had been the centre of import and export between Spain and Italy.

Claudio remembered a description of the city he had read in the *Memoirs* of a German traveller named Muenzer, who had visited Spain during the last decades of the fifteenth century and expressed his admiration for its orchards of lemons, oranges, and palms, and especially for the well-clad women of the region.

"At Valencia," said the German, "women dress with unusual, and perhaps excessive, caprice. Their gowns are cut so low in the neck that their breasts are in full view; and they paint their faces and make such use of perfumes and cosmetics as might properly be censured. The people of the town come out in the evening to walk about in the streets, which are crowded with such throngs that one would think oneself at a fair. There is perfect order, however, and quarrels are rarely seen. The shops, especially such as sell victuals, do not close their doors till midnight. Had I not witnessed it with my own eyes I would never have believed such a spectacle could be seen."

This rich and joyous town, the mirror as it were of the genteel Italy across the sea, received the Pope's Ambassador with royal honours. Borgia had to wait for two days in a

convent outside the city, that the preparations for his formal entry might be completed. The procession was two miles long. The Cardinal was mounted on a horse under a pallium supported by prominent individuals of the town. Before him marched the various brotherhoods of the parishes of the city, with crosses raised on high, each preceded and followed by companies of musicians and trumpeters. The streets over which the Cardinal rode were covered with carpetings.

During the days following came the stupendous banquets which Borgia offered in his episcopal palace in acknowledgment of so much courtesy. This Vice-Chancellor of the Holy See possessed, in addition to the rich benefices of Valencia, Cartagena and Oporto, and numerous abbacies, the fortune left by his brother, the late Don Pedro Luís. The whole of this enormous income he devoted to display. In Rome, in the year 1461, he had outdone the most opulent Cardinals in a competition as to which would best decorate his palace on the occasion of the Feast of the Corpus Domini. So he had vanquished his rivals in the Sacred College in celebrating the arrival in Rome of the head of Saint Andrew the Apostle; and more recently he had been the only one to take cognizance of the Pope's proclamation of the Crusade by furnishing at his own expense a galley completely armed. To believe his enemies, gluttony was the only vice Rodrigo Borgia did not practice.

His meals consisted of a single dish provided in abundant quantity. When he came to be Pope the cardinals looked upon an invitation to his private board as a penance. He was similarly sparing in his use of wine, a trait he had in common with many strong and active men of the Mediterranean. Whenever he drank, his beverages were weakened with water. But such habits of restraint did not prevent the Cardinal-Bishop of Valencia from offering memorable feasts in his palace on this occasion.

The decorations along the city streets reflected the specialties of the merchants or artisans who inhabited them. In the Tapineria—or “Street of Clogs and Pattens”—those shoes, or boots, with high cork soles invented by the Moors, which made a woman walk as though on stilts in a fashion that was popular as far abroad as Venice—the houses were hung with various kinds of clogs, some of them very costly, with the

soles made of gold or silver and inlaid with diamonds. All along the Plateria the gold-workers displayed their finest products on trays lined with velvets; and at the Puerta Nueva, near the site on which the famous Exchange was shortly to rise, the buildings were covered from roof to ground with rich silken fabrics. Meantime the thoroughfares were crowded with gentlemen of quality, riding about town on mules, their ladies on the cruppers of their saddles.

The nephew of Calixtus the Third was hailed by the city as a national glory. Everyone saw in him a future Pope. He was not able to linger long, however, among his townsmen; his principal errand was with the King of Aragon and the latter's son, Don Ferdinand the Catholic, who were laying siege to Barcelona. Ferdinand had recently married Princess Isabel, sister to the King of Castile, and was soliciting the Cardinal's aid in obtaining ecclesiastical recognition of that union. The Catholic sovereigns-to-be were second cousins, and licence for their marriage had been refused by Pope Paul the Second at the instance of the Kings of Castile and Portugal, who had political objections to the union of the two young people.

However, the then Archbishop of Toledo, Don Alfonso Carrillo de Acuña, a stout-fisted man who regarded his diocese as his personal property and dealt with ecclesiastical matters to his own liking, forged the necessary documents, and the wedding took place, the assumption being that the young couple were not aware of the irregularity in the ceremony. Later on Isabel began to grow restless. Her conscience pricked her that in the eyes of the Church she should be living in a state of concubinage. Being a Spaniard, the Vice-Chancellor Rodrigo Borgia had taken a great interest in the case, and he now came provided with a bull from Sixtus the Fourth in which that Pontiff reprobated the couple for having lived together well knowing their marriage was null, but at the same time ordered the Archbishop of Toledo to validate the ceremony. The dispensation was not to be offered gratuitously, we may be sure—Sixtus the Fourth hoped that Don Fernando, as King of Sicily and heir to the throne of Aragon, would requite it with ships and men for the Crusade against the Turks.

Cardinal Borgia spent some months in Catalonia, whence he returned to Valencia for an interview with Don Pedro de Mendoza. At that time Mendoza was only a Bishop—Bishop of Siguenza—and Borgia had been commissioned to present him with a red hat. Thereafter Don Pedro was the famous Cardinal Mendoza, who as Prime Minister to the Catholic Sovereigns was known the world over as the "Third Sovereign" of Spain. Titular lord of one of the wealthiest domains in the Church, Mendoza lived much more ostentatiously than the sovereigns themselves—they were always in financial straits. His display was that of a real cardinal of the epoch. He entered Valencia preceded by a band of negro musicians mounted on horses, and attended by a gorgeous company of Castilian knights, their breasts resplendent with chains of heavy gold. Behind him rode two hundred horses and a veritable army of falconers and game-beaters.

Forewarned as to the Castilian prelate's reputation for lavishness, Borgia greeted him with a banquet which reminded Valencian chroniclers of the splendours of Alfonso the Magnanimous. The rich tapestries that covered the tables were overladen with flowers, so arranged as to spell the motto on Borgia's episcopal shield: "*Ave Maria Gratia Plena.*" No less than eight bishops from one company or the other sat down at meat with the two powerful Princes of the Church, and a host of secular guests. The "washing of hands" was offered in "great basins of gilded silver with enamelled bottoms", whereupon cups of "green ginger"—an aromatic spice then added to all sauces—was set before the guests.

Next came seven great platters, each laden with two peacocks garnished with partridges, the head of each bird gilded with gold leaf, while from the necks hung little medallions with the escutcheon of the Borgias. The next course brought four silver trays, each as big as a shield and carried by four men, laden with huge pies, which, on being cut, gave out roasted ducks, coots, doves, chickens, kids, veals, and other toothsome bits. Each tray was escorted by a squad of servants bearing sauces adapted to each kind of roast, and its appearance was saluted by a crash of music from the minstrels, who had seats on a special platform set aside for them.

The climax of the feast came with the entrance of two

enormous trays, the viands so arranged as to figure a mountain covered with greens, the peak of each mountain serving as a rest for a peacock roasted in full plumage, its head intact, and spouting a stream of perfume through its beak. The flow of perfumed water continued as the carvers stripped the peacock of its flesh, working from under the wings. Finally came the so-called "white course"—various preparations of milk, eggs, and sugar, and round after round of sweets and candied fruits.

After several days of masquerading and feast-making, Cardinal Borgia set out with great pomp for Castile, entering Madrid under a silken canopy at the side of King Don Enrique the Impotent, who rode at his left hand. The Cardinal's purpose in asking this visit was to win the monarch's consent to the succession to his own throne of his sister, Doña Isabel, as against the claims of a party supporting his only daughter, nicknamed "the Beltrameja", who was being denounced as an illegitimate child. This policy of the Cardinal gained him many enemies in Madrid, but he finally induced Don Enrique to make peace with Isabel and Ferdinand. By the month of July 1463 Borgia was at liberty to return to Valencia and prepare for his voyage back to Rome.

The departure was set for the month of September. Many Valencian aristocrats and littérateurs made arrangements to follow the Cardinal, repeating that Spanish "March on Rome" which had taken place in the days of Calixtus the Third. Everyone had the greatest faith in Borgia's future. Hundreds of gentlemen and students had attached themselves to his retinue, and they marched to the landings—to quote the language of an eye-witness—"as joyously as to a wedding festival". The expedition—it amounted to that, what with the old train and its new adjuncts—embarked on two Venetian galleys. These were the only ships available at the moment, so that their captains were able to exact exorbitant prices for the transport.

Scarcely had the vessels reached open sea when one of those terrific hurricanes that sweep the Mediterranean in early autumn broke upon them, and the storm did not abate over the whole course of a voyage lasting more than a month, because of waits in various harbours where the ships were compelled to take refuge. Finally, on October 10th, the galleys were caught

unawares by a squall off Liorna and stripped of masts and rudders. One of the vessels foundered with all on board. The other was driven ashore, but before it broke to pieces on the rocks the Cardinal and some of the gentlemen in his company managed to make their way to safety.

By the following morning more than two hundred corpses had been washed ashore, among them the bodies of three Italian bishops who had accompanied the Legate on his journey to Spain. Seventy-five menials of the Cardinal's personal service were among the missing, and with them perished miserably twelve jurists, six knights, and a band of Valencian students, who had been turning Rome-ward or looking forward to studies at Bologna. The Cardinal, who got ashore in his shirt-tails, lost all his wardrobe and his jewels, among the latter the collection of precious gifts which he had been receiving from kings and barons in Spain, and several boxes of Manises ware which he had been carrying back to Rome.

In accord with the custom of those days the inhabitants along the coast looked upon the wreck as a gift from God, threw themselves upon the stranded hulk, robbed it of all valuables the sea had not claimed, and then stripped the dead of their clothing. Borgia's demeanour during the tragedy could not have been nobler. His smiling calm roused the admiration of the most hardened seamen.

The Cardinal of Valencia returned from his embassy to Spain with empty hands. He had gone to procure help for the Crusade. All he brought back was an abundance of promises from the Spanish kings, not one of which was ever fulfilled. Nevertheless, Sixtus the Fourth welcomed him in Rome as though he had accomplished miracles in favour of the Holy See.

From the time of this journey Borgia found himself called upon to deal with the ever-growing influence of Cardinal Giuliano della Rovere. The two were equally subtle, equally determined, equally unscrupulous, in the spirit of the political methods of the day. Borgia, if anything, had the advantage of a majestic calm, a tranquil valour, a caution which always prevented him from losing his head, and from saying things which he could not recall. Cardinal della Rovere was an impetuous quick-tempered man, and made many enemies by

his bursts of bitter anger and his vindictive animosities. Borgia perceived at once that Rovere was aspiring to the tiara, and began to consider himself as a candidate for that dignity.

In the year 1481 the terrible Mohammed, who had conquered Constantinople, died, and the event was hailed with festival and public illuminations by the inhabitants of the Eternal City. Sixtus the Fourth had managed to assemble a fleet of thirty-four vessels under command of one of his cardinals. Supported by ships of the King of Naples, the Papal squadron expelled the Turks who had landed at Otranto and occupied that town. But this victory came to little. The Cardinal-Admiral was not a strong man, and proved unable to deal with a mutiny which arose among the sailors after an outbreak of the plague on the vessels. The fleet had to return to Ostia. So one more attempt of the Papacy to make war on the Infidel came to naught.

Down to the day of his death Sixtus the Fourth made it his policy to replace such cardinals as died with young men of so-called "secular" character. The many relatives of his own whom he elevated to high posts in the Church evinced unconscionable greed and ambition therein, selling the most sacred things for money. Even the Pope was accused—without much proof, to be sure—of creating a "corner" in grain and selling the latter to the public at exorbitant prices.

Sixtus died, however, in August of the year 1484. On this occasion the violence of the Roman mob fell upon the Genoese, who had been so scandalously favoured by the defunct Pope, and who were now victims of even worse outrages than had marked the passage of earlier pontiffs. The palace of Gerolamo Riario was stripped to its bare walls. Even the trees in his gardens were cut down and carried away. Everything belonging to Genoese in the City of Rome was either stolen or destroyed—two vessels with cargoes aboard that were lying in the Tiber, a number of granaries, many shops.

The general anarchy prevailing furnished a natural opportunity for another outbreak of civil war between the Colonnas and the Orsinis. Peaceful inhabitants were obliged to keep to their homes. The palaces of the cardinals were turned into veritable fortresses. Giuliano della Rovere and Rodrigo Borgia garrisoned their elegant residences with mercenaries,

..... in passions and vices.

The "old-fashioned" cardinals were inclined to favour a man of their own virtuous tendencies, a Spaniard, Juan Molez, who had stood apart from Court intrigues and lived with the decorum befitting a saint of the old school. It was soon apparent, however, that his nationality would be an insuperable obstacle. None of the Italians would support him. The foreign observers then present in Rome felt certain that Rodrigo Borgia would be elected; and Borgia had the same feeling, for some days, for he took thorough measures to protect his palace from eventual plunder. Borgia's adversary, Rovere, concluded that he had no chance himself, and opined rather to work for a Pope who would owe everything to him and be under his control. He finally fixed upon Giambattista Civo, a Cardinal of Genoese extraction like the late Pope Sixtus the Fourth. Though born of a poor family, Civo was distantly related to the powerful line of the Dorias. Rovere resorted to every means to win the victory for him, even bribing some of the electors.

Civo at length carried the day and ascended the throne as Innocent the Eighth. He was a tall, strong, plump-faced, near-sighted individual, with remarkably white hair. He had two illegitimate children known under caressing diminutives: Theodorina and Franceschetto. His enemies asserted, however, that these were just his favourite offspring; that he was really the parent, some said of seven, some said of sixteen

sons and daughters. Civo had won the favour of Sixtus the Fourth by a bland conciliatory disposition which enabled him to be on terms of amity with everyone. Rovere foresaw that his own influence over this Pope would be even greater than the power he had enjoyed with his late uncle, and the Ambassadors in Rome reported to their home governments that the Cardinal of St. Peter's—in other words, Cardinal Giuliano della Rovere—would be the actual Pontiff.

Rovere soon perceived, however, that he had overlooked something. Pope Innocent brought his son Franceschetto to court, and that young man was eager to take advantage of his father's windfall by amassing a goodly fortune and having his fling in the world at last. Franceschetto was a heavy, and, on the whole, an unlucky, gambler. He tried to make ends meet by "fixing" all sorts of matters at court on commission.

Meantime Innocent the Eighth began to organize a Crusade just as his predecessors had done, and with even less fortune. His one achievement was to bring to Rome the young Turkish prince known as "Djem (or Hixem), the Grand Turk".

On the great Mohammed's death two of his sons had laid claim to the Imperial crown. Bajazet had finally come off victorious ; and Djem, the younger brother, though supported by a large following, was obliged to flee from Constantinople for his life. In the year 1482 he sought refuge with the Knights of St. John, who were at that time occupying the Isle of Rhodes. The Grand Master of the Order saw in Djem a powerful instrument for holding Bajazet in hand, and finally concluded with the Sultan in Constantinople a treaty by virtue of which the Knights of Rhodes would hold the Pretender Djem in safe keeping, on condition that the Turkish Emperor should not attack their island, and further pay an annual tribute of forty-five thousand ducats under guise of maintenance for the prisoner.

Djem was transferred to some lands which the Knights of St. John held in Auvergne, in France ; whereupon the sovereigns of France, Naples, and Hungary, as well as the Republic of Venice, and the Pope—everyone, in short, who had hopes of blackmailing Bajazet into leaving them in peace—began to intrigue to get the Turkish Pretender into their power.

Innocent the Eighth proved to be the highest bidder. He bribed the Grand Master of Rhodes with a cardinalate and with many privileges and prerogatives bestowed on the Grand Master's Order. The Turkish prince was accordingly sent to live in Rome under guard of some Knights of St. John. Since Djem was to be the Pope's guest, Innocent could henceforth count on the forty-five thousand annual ducats which the Sultan Bajazet was paying.

The arrival of the Turkish prince threw all Rome into excitement. In the days when Mohammed had been taking Constantinople a prediction had gone abroad that the Grand Turk would one day enter the Eternal City and fix his lodgings in the Vatican. Everyone saw in Djem's arrival the divine fulfilment of the prophecy, though in an inverted sense, since the Grand Turk was coming not as a conqueror but as a captive. He was given quarters in the Vatican, and lived tranquilly there for many years, not without being a source of constant worry to his elder brother, for the Janissaries, as well as the Turkish population at large, seemed ready to rise behind him should he ever present himself at home.

Djem's arrival was in part overshadowed by an event of indeed greater significance. On the night of January 31st, in the year 1492, news reached Rome that Granada had surrendered to the Catholic sovereigns on the second of that month, that Christian banners were flying from the turrets of the Alhambra, and that a great silver crucifix which Sixtus the Fourth had presented to the Christian forces had found its pedestal in the palace of the Moorish kings. The surrender of Granada was regarded in Rome as a sort of compensation for the loss of Constantinople.

Ferdinand and Isabel sent a hundred Moorish prisoners to the Pope in gratitude for the help he had lent them during their victorious campaign. Though very ill at the time, Innocent the Eighth rode in the procession from the Vatican to the Spanish church of San Domenico in the Piazza Navona and sang a *Te Deum* there. Public festivities were numerous and spectacular. The Spanish Ambassador arranged a sham battle enacting the conquest of Granada. Cardinal Riario paid for a splendid procession depicting the entrance of the Spanish sovereigns into the Alhambra. In the Piazza Navona,

Rodrigo Borgia held the first bullfight in Spanish style ever seen in Italy.

Bajazet, the Grand Turk, was in constant communication with the Pope now that the latter was custodian of his dangerous brother Djem. He decided to make a great gift to Innocent—a precious relic, the authenticity of which he, as a loyal Mussulman, could guarantee: the lance with which Longinus pierced the body of Christ on the Cross. As the priceless object neared Rome, personal delegates of the Pope, headed by Cardinal della Rovere, went far out from the city to meet the Turkish envoys and receive the Holy Lance from their hands. The weapon was borne in procession across the city to the private apartments of the Pontiff, and Innocent, though on the verge of death, rose from his bed to preside over the solemn ceremony of welcome. On this conspicuous occasion Cardinal Borgia found himself outshone by Cardinal della Rovere, who stood on the Pope's right hand.

He had to do something to recoup for this lost prestige, so he attended the transfer of the Holy Lance clad in a magnificent coat of mail in Spanish style, with a costly sword at his side, and on his head a helmet inlaid with pearls and topped with a glowing crest of plumes. He was mounted, furthermore, on a fiery charger, which he managed with the skill of a trained horseman.

The acceptance of the Holy Lance was the last public appearance of Innocent the Eighth. During the months of June and July he lay between life and death. He expended his last resources of energy in assembling the Cardinals about his bed, exhorting them to brotherly love, and urging them to elect a successor more worthy than he. He died early in the evening of July 25th, in the year 1492.

Among the more notable acts of Innocent the Eighth, Claudio remembered the encouragement he had offered the Catholic Sovereigns in the furtherance of their policy of expelling the Jews from Spain, and also a bull he issued against witches and black magic in Germany—a document that was to be used during later years as basis for the varied persecutions of the Inquisition. It was during Innocent's reign, also, and largely in imitation of the conduct of the Pope's son, Francesco Cibo, that a wholesale traffic in forged documents

began among the clerks and scribes of the Holy See. Franceschetto developed this industry to extricate himself from plights resulting from his huge losses at play. Whenever young Cibo was not going the rounds of Rome with a company of roisterers and defending himself from the fathers and husbands of pretty girls whom he had ravished, he was usually to be found gambling at the palace of Cardinal Riario, who was indefatigable at such play. One night Franceschetto lost a sum equivalent to thirty thousand modern pounds, and complained to his father, the Pope, that the Cardinal was playing with marked cards. This must have been the case, for everyone who played with Riario—even his colleagues in the Consistory—ended poorer than they began.

Claudio had seen the tomb of Innocent the Eighth, a monument in bronze with beautiful examples of contemporary sculpture which caused it to be carefully preserved during changes from the old church of St. Peter to the modern Basilica. Its fame in the history of art caused Innocent the Eighth to be remembered while many Popes more talented than he have dropped from view. The inscription on the tomb declared him the Pope under whose reign the Discovery of the New World took place. This, however, was a falsehood devised many years after Innocent's death by enemies and slanderers of Alexander the Sixth, eager to rob the execrated Borgia of the greatest episode of his pontificate. On July 25th, 1492, Christopher Columbus was still in Palos, at a loss as to how to find sailors for his expedition, and waiting for Martin Alonso Pinzon to save him by recruiting mariners along the Spanish coast.

CHAPTER III

LA VANNOZZA AND LA FARNESSINA

WHENEVER Doña Natí turned her acid tongue upon Enciso de las Casas she would invariably reach the same conclusion :

"He likes low-down people, and can't help it—a fine thing, I must say, in a man who makes a show of his religion—and is father to more children than you can count! . . . And such a good wife, stupid as she is!"

If the Ambassador ever heard such waggings he tried to cancel them with a sort of condescending laugh. Bustamante's wealthy friend and present colleague in diplomacy was eager above all else to be known as an artist and writer. Enciso de las Casas held to a romantic view of life. As he saw it, all great men had more or less irregular careers, and the greater they were, the greater the irregularities. He considered talent impossible unless it were accompanied by defects and aberrations on the side of scandal; and, reversing his reasoning, he was inclined to think that anyone who showed himself emancipated from commonplace morality must be a genius, even though he gave no other signs of it. That was why he felt irresistibly attracted to intellectuals and sinners, and tended to confuse the two breeds in his mind.

Doña Nativity's gossip did not miss its mark entirely. Enciso called on the Pope once a month, and maintained close relations with most of the dignitaries of the Church; but he also felt obliged to be "a bit of a Bohemian" even on the magnificent plane where he lived. It was his impulse to extend fraternal indulgence to those who held conventions, social or moral, in contempt and lived their lives outside of them. Enciso de las Casas did not choose to be an antiquary and a bibliophile for nothing! Hence it came about that in company with the

Cardinals who gathered about his board could be found not a few adventurers of celebrated names—ruined aristocrats without visible means of support, and artists whose escapades were noised about in hushed words with significant winks and blushing faces.

"I am satisfied," Enciso would say, "provided a person can show some romance in his life. You have got to be somebody in this world—then the evil ends by becoming good. God is merciful toward all sinners, isn't He? We must imitate His infinite goodness so far as we are able."

This lack of discrimination surprised many of his friends, who could not understand it in a man so evidently harmless, so conspicuously a gentleman. He made all South Americans passing through Rome his guests, and smiled appreciatively at the praises they showered on his luxurious hospitality.

"That's the difference between me and my colleagues from other countries across the sea," he would say with false modesty. "You see, I am an artist in my way. I have connections and interests unknown to them. I am sorry people over there are not better informed as to the importance of the position I have won in Rome here for my country."

That Enciso was personally above reproach was evident from the admiration which South American matrons expressed for him, even wishing for their daughters husbands as prosperous and as exemplary as Enciso de las Casas.

"What luck for Leonora!" they would say. "What a splendid match!"

In fact, Enciso was annoyed rather than not at his reputation for conjugal fidelity, which no one seemed inclined to doubt.

"Don't be so sure, Señora!" he would answer with an expression on his face which he meant to make significant. "Don't be so sure! How do you know I am not deceiving you? I really can be quite a devil, you know."

"You, Manuel?" And the ladies would quit him in mocking incredulity.

Enciso a "devil"! No one could believe it, and to such an extent that Enciso wondered whether his good reputation were not a reflection upon his standing as a man of talent.

As a matter of fact, he really was a good husband and

father, able really to be interested only in his family : a commonplace individual, incapable of a double life, a *bourgeois* condemned, however hard he tried, to halt on the thresholds of Bohemia without ever entering Bohemia itself. And the diplomat found compensation for his disabilities by showering his affection on the inhabitants of a hell that was closed to him.

Claudio Borja he found interesting in spite of the young man's moodiness and rather inarticulate melancholy. Claudio, in his eyes, was one of those who could show romance in their lives ; and Claudio was pleased rather than not that Enciso should make frequent allusions to the pretty widow from the Argentine by way of expressing admiration for him. Enciso, indeed, was the only one in Rome who seemed to remember Rosaura's existence—doubtless because she too could show romance in her life ! He would avail himself of the most roundabout pretexts for mentioning the beautiful Argentinian, always with a smiling considerateness but at the same time with an expression in his eyes that would rest upon the young man as much as to say : "I know everything, and I congratulate you on your good fortune."

In reality Enciso had always admired Señora de Pineda with a wistfulness born of a feeling that she would be for ever beyond his reach. A woman like her would have rounded out his life on the artistic side ! But since he judged her inaccessible he consoled himself by admiring those luckier than he, finding in Claudio a reflection of Rosaura's glory. To this, indeed, Claudio probably owed his frequent invitations to the diplomat's house, where they would sit talking for long periods in the vast library surrounded by cases of elegantly bound volumes.

"I am a good Catholic," said Enciso one afternoon after lunching with Borja ; "I obey all the commandments the Church imposes on me ; but at the same time I am a human being, and I understand the weaknesses of human beings, the logical consequences of their frailty. For example, I like the Borgias, and I don't feel any less a Catholic on that account. Oh, to be sure, I don't go so far as to set them up as a family of saints, the way some of their defenders do. But I don't think they were such black devils as their detractors try to paint

them. In their vices they were on the whole the counterparts of their contemporaries, and if they were a little worse than others, at one point or another, it was only a little worse, and the excess was due to certain qualities they had—their energy, their eagerness to surpass others, their love of bludgeoning public opinion—all traits of us Mediterraneans at large.

"All the Borgias were devout believers. Let's say nothing of Calixtus the Third, a man of blessed memory. Alexander the Sixth, the most abominated of the clan, was an eminent Pontiff who managed the affairs of the Church with masterly hand and left her domain so powerful that his successor and rival, Julius the Second, owed the lion's share of his grandeur to the Borgia legacy. Rodrigo Borgia proffered sincere worship to the Virgin. Wherever he went he carried on his person, hung about his neck or from a wrist, a crystal reliquary containing a consecrated Host, so that, in case sudden death should overtake him, he could receive Communion without loss of time."

Enciso paused a moment as though his mind were making a rapid flight back over history.

"To judge the past with modern standards," he resumed, "is to fall into lamentable error and miss the spirit of the men of those days. Their lives were much more complex than ours. They lived in a period of renaissance when their thirst for pleasure, awakened by learning, was struggling with an ascetic education taught them as Christians in their youth. I think I understand perfectly the sense of devoutness that impelled Pope Alexander to worship the Virgin and to carry the Host on his person while indulging in an aggressive licentiousness quite suggestive of the animal that figured on his family shield. The morals of the Church had not yet been purified by the criticisms of the Protestants. It was still a long way to the Council of Trent and its new discipline for ecclesiastics. People talked of the worldly vices of men of the cloth in a spirit of amusement and jest, never with indignation or a sense of outrage, as we do now."

Enciso thought of an analogy to minimize the viciousness of the Borgias and other Popes and Cardinals of those times. They were, he thought, like soldiers guilty of infractions of

military discipline and setting bad examples by insubordination, seditious speeches, or other demoralizing acts. But such a soldier was not a traitor ; he still stood by his flag ; he had not gone over to the enemies of his country ! So these sinners among the Popes and Cardinals, in spite of their disorderly lives, were good Catholics ; and, oftentimes, as was the case with Alexander the Sixth, by virtue of their talents and characters they contributed to the grandeur of the Church more notably than Popes of greater virtue. Not one of them lapsed into heresy ; on the contrary, they showed themselves intolerant and relentless defenders of the Faith.

"Rodrigo Borgia was ever concerned with maintaining the integrity of Catholic dogma and expanding the Church's domains. Not only was he sober at table and temperate in beverage, he was never a gambler, as were Scarampo, the two Riarios, and other Cardinals. As regards women, who exerted an irresistible fascination over him down to his extreme age, he might, like other Popes, have called his children 'nephews' and kept them out of sight. Instead he was a Spaniard, incapable of subterfuges and hypocrisies in matters touching his affections. He loved his offspring with a Southerner's devotion, and was concerned to help them and enrich them as a fond parent would. The outstanding defects of this man, unquestionably superior to all his contemporaries in firmness, courage, coolness, and talent for government, were strong animal instincts and an inordinate passion for his children."

Enciso's library contained everything that had been written on the Borgias from the time of their establishment in Rome. He had gone into their biographies in detail and knew their ways of living, their adventures, their houses and furnishings, the menus of their banquets. A description of the second residence of Rodrigo Borgia had been found in a recently discovered letter of Cardinal Ascanio Sforza, Rodrigo's most intimate friend in the Sacred College.

Ordinarily a man of frugal diet, the Cardinal of Valencia once gave a magnificent dinner to Sforza and other ecclesiastical delegates, among them Giuliano della Rovere. The walls of the palace rooms were covered with tapestries portraying historic episodes. Each of the halls, in accord with a fashion prevalent at the time, had a guest-couch, which was

regarded as the most important article in a well-furnished mansion. Sforza, in the letter in question, notes that the carpets and tapestries were in perfect harmony with the colour of the room. The couch of honour in the inner hall was covered with cloth of gold draped down on Egyptian carpeting. There were sideboards, or *credenze*, laden with gold and silver plate embossed by the most famous goldsmiths in Europe.

"Borgia and Rovere were friends at the time. Indeed, they were always combining or quarrelling according to the political situation that happened to prevail. On the whole, Rovere was the more consistent and implacable in his hatreds, because rivalry, in his case, was soured with envy. He felt vaguely jealous of the social successes of the Cardinal of Valencia, and of that mysterious magnetism which, according to observers of the time, Borgia seemed to exercise upon women. He was irritated by the certainty that Borgia would be Pope before him, despite the pressure he was exerting on Innocent the Eighth (an influence which disgusted ambassadors from abroad and provoked one of them to remark savagely : 'Why have two Popes, when one is bad enough?'). The two rivals came almost to blows at the bedside of Innocent the Eighth.

"Himself Vice-Chancellor of the Church, Borgia could not endure the airs Rovere was arrogating to himself; and the Cardinal of Valencia, always good-humoured, compliant, courteous, was never more dangerous than when he could move an antagonist to wrath. A tall, muscular man, ever ready for action, he went about for the most part dressed in secular clothes with a sword at his belt. As for Ascanio Sforza, Borgia's most intimate associate, his special diversion was the hunt, and with benefices netting him annually some million and a half in gold francs, he had better horses, dogs, and falcons, and better equipment for the care of such costly animals, than any monarch of the time.

"Worldly Cardinals like Borgia, Sforza, and Rovere were like senators of ancient Rome, in that they moved about surrounded by a court of parasites, not to mention numbers of nephews or children. They travelled in military costume, with cape and sword. Their palaces were managed by hundreds of servants, who, in case of danger, were reinforced by mercenary troops. The richer and more worldly captained

factions of partisans who bore their names, rivalling one another in display during periods of festival, providing the money for processions of masks, serenades with instruments and singers, or theatrical companies who acted plays in the streets in front of their residences. The ancient nobility of Rome lived in relative poverty as compared with these potentates of the Church. Hardly a Cardinal but had his retinue of painters, sculptors, poets, and scholars, who created and wrote in honour of their patron's person or family."

Rodrigo Borgia had had a son, named Pedro Luís, by a Roman lady whose identity has never been established; and also a daughter Gerolomina, probably born of a different mother still. This was before the year 1468, when the Cardinal of Valencia, who till then had been merely a deacon, was constrained to take priestly orders in order to occupy the Bishopric of Albans.

But he continued his irregular life after his consecration. The woman who gave him most children and remained with him longest was Giovanna de' Catanzo (or Catanei), commonly known in Rome as La Vannozza. No portrait of this woman has come down to us, but tradition represents her as a sort of Juno of the Trasteverine populace—tall, blooming, majestic, of ravishing beauty. She was the abiding affection of Rodrigo Borgia, who, for the rest, was not of a fickle, roving disposition, but gave a touch of homelike tranquillity to his amorous relations. La Vannozza bore the Cardinal four children: Giovanni (who became second Duke of Gandia), Cesare, Lucretia, and Geoffrey Borgia. Meanwhile she married no less than three times, her husbands accepting such dishonourable rôles in life in order to profit by lucrative posts accorded them by the Cardinal. By the time Borgia became Pope, Giovanna de' Catanzo was no longer his mistress, but was living quietly and with dignity as the mother of his children in a palace she owned in Rome near the Cardinal's residence. She reached the ripe old age of seventy-six, and saw all the Borgias in their graves. The people about her held her in high esteem, especially because of her munificent gifts to the Church of Santa Maria del Popolo, where she built herself a tomb with an epitaph displaying all the vanity of a triumphant plebeian. Mother, she called herself, of John,

Duke of Gandia; of Cesar, Duke of Valence; of Geoffrey, Prince of Squillace; and of Lucretia, Duchess of Ferrara.

Both of the children born before La Vannozza's time disappeared before Borgia became Pope, Gerolomina without leaving any trace at all, and Pedro Luis (namesake of the Cardinal's brother) after a brilliant and promising boyhood. Sent to Spain by his father to fight against the Moors under Ferdinand the Catholic, Pedro Luis distinguished himself as a soldier on numerous battlefields. His father finally bought him the Duchy of Gandia and arranged a marriage for him with Doña Maria Enriques, cousin of King Ferdinand. However, the young man was recalled to Rome in 1488, fell ill, and died very shortly, whereupon his duchy passed to Giovanni, the first-born of La Vannozza, whom the father was likewise turning toward a career in arms. Cesare, his second son by the Roman beauty, Rodrigo directed towards the Church. This was done while Cesare was still a mere lad, and without consulting his preferences. It was now a family tradition that the elder brother should be a soldier and the second a churchman. So it had been with Rodrigo in the days of Calixtus the Third.

The perpetual Vice-Chancellor was open-handed enough in favouring his children. Cesare was five years old when Sixtus the Fourth removed the canonical obstacles to his assumption of orders. Why not, since his father was a Cardinal-Bishop and his mother a married woman? At the age of seven he became Prothonotary of the Church, enjoying ecclesiastical benefices in Játiva and other Spanish cities. Innocent the Eighth named him Bishop of Pamplona while he was still a child. And there was nothing absurd in all that! Few ecclesiastics of importance resided on their domains. Those who received investitures usually sent some priest to govern in their name, and concerned themselves with their charges only to the extent of verifying the incomes from them!

"I have read and re-read many times," said Enciso, "a letter which Cardinal Borgia wrote to the head of the chapter at Pamplona, announcing the appointment of this ten-year-old Bishop—and a model of amiability and politeness it was, revealing its author's profound acquaintance with the foibles of human nature! Had the good canons of Pamplona been

surprised at finding themselves subordinates of a Bishop hardly issued from the cradle, they might easily have read between the lines that they were really subject to a Vice-Chancellor of the Holy See, a man almost as powerful as the Pope himself, who placed all his influence at the disposal of their parish, and of themselves individually, should they ever need anything in Rome! Could they be anything but grateful?

Geoffrey Borgia, a namesake of his grandfather, and the only one of Rodrigo's children who left no history, likewise became a Canon and an Archdeacon of the Cathedral at Valencia when he was still a baby. Being a woman, Lucretia Borgia could not aspire to any benefices within the Church. Her father accordingly thought for a time of marrying her into one of those Valencian houses which had been friendly to the Borgias from the days when Calixtus the Third was acting as secretary to Alfonso of Aragon.

Contemporaries of Rodrigo found him "an intelligent man by nature, versatile, sagacious, of lofty ideals, wondrously assiduous and capable in the management of public affairs". He was not a great orator in public addresses, but in conversation in intimate groups he displayed an eloquence and a learning that dazzled those who heard him.

"I can imagine him speaking as Pope," said Enciso, "in his audiences with Cardinals and Ambassadors. He must have had a deep, musical voice, in keeping with his majestic frame and his flashing coal-black eyes. As is frequently the case among men of the South, he was a good deal of an actor, always expressing himself with a certain affectation of solemnity. Something of this formal eloquence, which Alexander the Sixth used not only on public occasions but in private interviews, is suggested in a report by one of the Venetian Ambassadors to his government. Whenever he gave a confidential audience to an Ambassador—secrecy was one of the pawns in the game of diplomatic trickery—he would introduce him into a tiny office, lock the door on the inside, and then, pointing to a chair, admonish with great solemnity: 'Pray be seated, Excellency, and remember—whatever we say here shall be known to three persons only: to you, to me, and to God, who is our witness!' And he would raise his hand in reverent gesture toward Heaven, speaking in a voice

so impressive that the wily Venetian, born sceptic though he was, and well knowing the Pope's abilities as a comedian, could not contain his emotion in spite of himself."

The Borgia palace, to-day known as Palazzo Sforza-Cesarini, was situated half-way along the street between the Bridge of Sant' Angelo and the Campo de' Fiori. It was then regarded as one of the finest in Rome. The Cardinal's post as Vice-Chancellor produced an annual income of thirty-two thousand modern pounds. His minor bishoprics also brought in lucrative incomes. His jewels (especially his pearls), his tapestries, his gorgeous vestments, and his library filled with volumes of literature and science were famous in the city. A skilled horseman by the time he was eight years old, he had better stables than many a king and even than the Pope himself. Everyone suspected that he also had treasure in coin hidden away somewhere: despite his generosity and magnificence he saved large sums of money during every one of his thirty-seven years as Cardinal—a reserve that was to prove the decisive factor in his battle with Giuliano della Rovere.

The long illness of Innocent the Eighth enabled the Sacred College to take precautions against such disturbances of the public peace as usually ensued on the death of a Pope, and the Conclave assembled on the 6th of August, in the year 1492, in an atmosphere of relative calm. ("Not more than a hundred or two people have been killed this time", an Ambassador reported of events in Rome after Innocent's death.) Twenty-three cardinals were present. The inaugural sermon was preached by the Spanish bishop, Don Bernadino Lopez de Carvajal, who dwelt on the grave conditions prevailing in the Church and the need of "a speedy and judicious selection".

Giuliano della Rovere had been Pope in everything but name during the last years of Innocent's pontificate, and he was counting on stepping directly into the shoes of Saint Peter by buying out such Cardinals as were for sale—he had done that at the preceding Conclave. Since he represented the interests of France at the Papal Court, Charles the Eighth, it was whispered, had deposited a sum equivalent to four hundred thousand pounds with a financier in Rome, to be used as Rovere saw fit. The Republic of Genoa had sent on

another two hundred thousand. The Genoese took his election for granted. The King of Naples also seemed to be inclined toward Cardinal della Rovere.

Against him stood four candidates at all probable: Cardinal Costa, a Portugese ecclesiast representing the "old-fashioned" moral element in the College; Cardinal Sforza; Cardinal Graffa; and finally, running a bad fourth, Rodrigo Borgia. A Bishop named Bocciardo, Ambassador in Rome from Ferrara, seems to have left the keenest of the prognostications made at the time. "Borgia", Bocciardo reminded his government, "is Vice-Chancellor of the Church. He wields a power almost as great as the Pope himself. The post has so many bishoprics and abbacies at its disposal, its properties are so vast, its income so enormous, that the Cardinals may be tempted to elect Borgia in the hope that the plums he now holds will fall from his hands and become available for distribution among themselves."

The most serious objection to Borgia was his Spanish birth. Many Italian Cardinals refused even to consider the nomination of an "Ultramontain", as they said in those days of a foreigner born beyond the Alps. But it was as though the wily diplomat from Ferrara had been informed in advance of Borgia's strategy. Holding himself in the background as the least assertive of the candidates, he began his manœuvres of friendly and well-mannered corruption, corresponding to operations of a similar nature carried on by Cardinal della Rovere with the treasures furnished by France and Genoa.

Cardinal Sforza was the first to give way. Convinced, after a time, that his own chances were slim, he began to listen to proposals from his friend Borgia. In exchange for his votes Rodrigo offered him the Vice-Chancellorship, the Borgia palace with all its furnishings, which Sforza so much admired, and, in addition, the castle at Nepi, the bishopric of Erlau (which alone brought in an income of twenty thousand modern pounds), and other minor considerations still.

The strong and wealthy towns of Monticelli and Soriano, Rodrigo Borgia promised to cede to Cardinal Orsini, with the Legation to the March of Ancona and the bishopric of Cartagena. Cardinal Colonna got the abbacy of Subiaco with all the strongholds lying about; Cardinal Savelli,

Civita-Castellana and the bishopric of Mallorca; Palavicini, the bishopric of Pamplona which belonged to Rodrigo's son Cesare; Cardinal Michiel, the bishopric of Porto; and Cardinals Sclafenati, San Severino and Riario, rich benefices and abbacies of less famous name. Even Cardinal Domenico della Rovere abandoned his relative Giuliano under pressure of higher concessions from Borgia. And there were "spiritual" considerations to be taken into account besides! The "worldly" Cardinals believed that under government by the then Vice-Chancellor living would be even more pleasant than it had been before.

By dint of this division of spoils Borgia managed to win fourteen votes among his own followers and those of the Sforza party. He lacked only one vote of the necessary two-thirds majority. But he seemed unable to obtain it: none of the opposite party dared swing about, in the certain knowledge that the rivalry between their leader and Rodrigo Borgia would be fought out to the bitter end. The battle finally centred on Cardinal Gerardo, an old man ninety-five years of age, almost in his dotage, and both sides did their best to win him. In the end Borgia's assability and Sforza's subtlety won the old Cardinal over, and his vote brought victory to the Cardinal of Valencia.

On the morning of the 11th of August the window in the hall of the Conclave was thrown open to announce that the Vice-Chancellor, Rodrigo Borgia, had been elected Pope, and would take the name of Alexander the Sixth. The news was greeted with astonishment at first. Not so very many had taken his candidacy seriously. He was a foreigner and a Spaniard, and everyone feared a new schism if a non-Italian Cardinal attained the tiara. His victory, therefore, gives some impression of the prestige which he must have won in Rome and the respect in which he was held in the courts of Italy as well as in the rest of Europe. It was of little avail for his enemies to protest against the measures he had used at the Conclave, and for the sharp-tongued Infesura to write that "Alexander the Sixth made himself Pope by dividing his property among the poor". After the first moments of stupor had passed, everyone admitted that this Cardinal, who had served as Vice-Chancellor under five Popes and was more

expert in ecclesiastical affairs than any living man, was the wisest possible choice at that moment. He had all the qualities of a great temporal ruler, and no one would be more likely to bring the Church safely through the problems then confronting her. People recalled his tireless application to his duties, and the fact that over a long period of thirty-seven years he had never missed a single Consistory of the Church, except in case of serious illness—something that could not have been said of any other Cardinal. The Romans, for their part, had at last found a man to their liking. They approved of the bearing of this handsome Pope who rode about their town as majestic as a king. The precocious Pico della Mirandola wrote a panegyric in Borgia's honour, glorifying among all his qualities his physical attractiveness especially.

"With the irregularities in his personal life," said Enciso, "and his many illegitimate children, no one at the time had any fault to find. In Italy, and in the rest of Christendom, people viewed licentiousness in high ecclesiastical dignitaries with an indulgence which the modern mind can scarcely understand. Borgia's election was hailed with joy both at home and abroad, many Humanists of distinction joining the popular Pico in proclaiming their satisfaction that the pontifical throne had fallen to a man of such eminent qualifications, who gave promise of a long and brilliant pontificate."

On the evening of the day of the election the "Conservers", or *adiles*, of Rome rode in torchlight procession to the Papal Palace to offer their homage to the new Pontiff. With them marched eight hundred Roman citizens of prominence. Bonfires blazed in every street, while throngs rioted up and down, cheering the name of the sometime Cardinal of Valencia.

His coronation on the 26th of August was a ceremony memorable for its splendour. Ambassadors informed their governments that "never before had the like been seen in Rome". The nobility of the Papal States flocked to the Eternal City. The buildings along the streets were covered with tapestries and garlands of flowers. Arches of triumph were erected in many places bearing laudatory poems in Humanistic Latin, addressed to Alexander the Sixth—one such, a Latin distich, proclaiming: "A Cæsar made Rome

great; now Alexander exalts her boldly to the stars: that Cesar was a man, this Alexander a god." Chroniclers pay naive testimony to the public's admiration for this new Pope, "tall of body, of vigorous manhood, of majestic bearing, riding a snow-white charger with the skill of a perfect knight, smiling serenely upon the multitudes and blessing them with noble gesture". An eye-witness of the coronation, one Michael Fernus, ends his story with these superlatives: "What noble majesty on his brow! What geniality in his gaze! How enhanced the veneration he inspires by the splendour and dignity of a strong handsome physique, which bespeaks the florid health he enjoys!"

The coronation procession consumed hours in forcing its way from the Vatican to the Lateran Church through the aggressive throngs that fought through the guarding lines to kiss the feet of the Pontiff or touch his white war-horse. It was mid-August, and the heat and dust caused many prostrations. The Pope himself, in spite of his strength and endurance, fainted as he was dismounting in front of the Lateran basilica, and did not revive till his face had been dashed with water.

"This spontaneous acclaim," said Enciso, "a tribute not paid to preceding Popes, stands in contrast with the unheard-of insults and denunciations which were heaped upon Alexander, years later, by this same Roman populace and by the very poets who on this occasion were hailing him."

And the enthusiasm was not confined to Rome. Milan and Florence broke into public rejoicing at the advent of the Spanish Pope. As regards Milan, the demonstration may have been the work of Cardinal Sforza, who was a relative of the reigning Duke and a great friend of the Borgias. But there was nothing artificial in the tribute paid by Florence, and even at Genoa, the home of the Roveres, all except actual partisans of that family gratefully recalled the memory of Calixtus the Third and applauded the ascension of his nephew. Writers in Germany felt that "the world had reason to place great hopes on the virtues of the new Pontiff", and the regent of Spain sent envoys bearing gifts of magnificent horses and precious furs.

Borgia's first measures seemed to justify the confidence

which most of his contemporaries reposed in him. First of all he restored order in the city, that its inhabitants might live in peace. Two hundred and twenty murders had taken place in the period between the final illness of Innocent the Eighth and the coronation of Alexander the Sixth. Four delegates were appointed to hear complaints on the part of citizens, and Alexander himself granted audiences to such as desired to bring important matters to his personal attention. To put the Church finances in order he set the example of economy himself by limiting the expenditures of his private Court to one thousand four hundred pounds a month. His table was of such simplicity that the Cardinals, and especially his friend Sforza, accustomed to sumptuous dining, regarded acceptance of an invitation to his house as a professional hazard. Even his son Cesare, and Cardinal Giovanni Borgia, his nephew, likewise tried to avoid these meals of a single course.

The Ambassadors in Rome all approved the election. Alexander was the Pope long awaited, who was to reform the spendthrift Court of Rome; re-establish order in the city, and set the example of a modest and just régime in the Church, with some regard to the principles of Christianity. They were all well aware of the life he had been leading, of the amusements he had permitted himself in youth and in maturer manhood. They knew about his women and his children. But at that time people commonly distinguished between a man and the office he held. The fact that Cardinal Borgia lived in scandal as others had done was no reason for doubting his ability to be a great Pontiff.

"Unfortunately," continued Enciso, "his passionate devotion to his family, his ambition to raise the house of Borgia to permanent power, lay at the bottom of all his projects and policies. This, after all, was nothing more or less than what Calixtus the Third had tried to do in advancing his nephew, Pedro Luis. But Alexander the Sixth manifested the full vehemence of his personality in furthering such ambitions, and his heirs, besides, were not his nephews, but his sons. The moment Rodrigo Borgia found the tiara on his head he rewarded his electors according to pledges given; and then, even before the Conclave had dissolved, raised his son Cesare,

at the time barely fifteen years old, to the Archbishopric of Valencia, a post created by the preceding Pope at his instance, and, with its annual income of sixty-four thousand modern pounds, constituting one of the richest benefices in Christendom. Almost in the same breath he elevated his nephew Giovanni Borgia, previously Archbishop of Monreale, to the College of Cardinals."

At this point the diplomat smiled as though entreating Claudio's forgiveness for the slight he was about to pay the young man's fellow-countrymen :

"We must not forget, either, that Rome was again besieged by relatives and townsmen of the Borgia family. Many Valencians appeared on the scene, though their sole title to recognition was the fact that they came from the same locality as the Pope. Other Spaniards from other regions considered their mere nationality as good reason for preferences. The 'March on Rome' that took place under Calixtus the Third was nothing compared to the Spanish invasion which marked the ascension of Alexander the Sixth. A plague of Spanish locusts seemed to settle on the Vatican, its perquisites and dependencies. Borgia was by nature a generous, open-handed man; and though he had passed most of his life in Italy and counted his best friends among Italians, he enjoyed being surrounded by Spaniards and hearing his native language. He filled all the posts in his personal service with people from Valencia, and talked with them in the Valencian dialect, the language which the Borgias used among themselves."

Here was already enough to compromise the Pontiff's good intentions and deflect him in the directions followed by his predecessors! But another thing supervened to become a source of greater scandal still—an untimely, half-senile love-affair which was the laughing-stock first of Rome and later of all Europe.

His relations with La Vannozza were now a matter of the distant past, attested only by the presence of four children : Giovanni, Cesare, Lucretia, and Geoffrey—the affair with that wholesome girl from the plebeian quarter across the Tiber had begun shortly after his return from his mission in Spain. At a time when Cardinal Borgia was fifty-two, Vannozza was

already forty, well past the age for inspiring any specially wild enthusiasms in the powerful magnate to whom she had belonged. Vannozza, however, was not a woman to sulk and pine at her desertion by the Cardinal. She straightway married her second husband, an intriguing littérateur, quite willing to close an eye on his bride's past! For a long time thereafter Rodrigo Borgia lived without giving further cause for public gossip, while many of his colleagues in the Sacred College were gambling madly or making public ostentation of their mistresses. He seemed wholly absorbed in educating Vannozza's four children and providing for their futures. He had taken them from their mother and sent them to be educated elsewhere, opining that that buxom, passionate, and good-natured woman of the people was, nevertheless, an ignorant uncultivated person, with no distinction in manner or tastes. She would not be likely to furnish the proper environment for young people destined to high station.

Prominent in the Roman aristocracy of the time was a niece of Cardinal Borgia, Adriana de Milá y Borja, granddaughter of Catalina Borja, the second sister of Calixtus the Third.

"You probably remember," said Enciso, "that the sisters of the first Borgia were known in Valencia as 'the Bishopesses' (*las Bisbesas*) at a time when Alfonso Borgia was just a Bishop in that town. The 'Bishopesses' even occupied the Episcopal Palace in Valencia while their brother was absent in Italy, and received suitors for their daughters in the very halls of that residence. This, at least, was the case with three of the sisters; for the youngest of the four, Doña Francisca, remained a spinster all her life and died in the odour of sanctity, setting the precedent, as it were, for Saint Francis Borgia in that family of strong men and women, where everyone seemed destined to do unusual things, either becoming a great saint or a great sinner."

"Doña Catalina, elder sister to Rodrigo's mother Isabel, married a nobleman of Játiva, Don Juan de Milá; and Doña Adriana was a granddaughter of this pair. She came to Rome and played a conspicuous part in Roman society as grand-niece of a Pope and niece to the famous Cardinal-Vice-Chancellor. She eventually married Luigi Orsini, lord of the

stronghold at Bassanello. Left a widow with one son, she threw herself merrily into the gay life of the capital, setting great store on her double prestige as a Borgia by blood and an Orsini by marriage. The Vice-Chancellor thought himself fortunate in having such a great lady at hand. To her he entrusted the education of his four children and sent them to live in her palace near the Monte Giordano.

"For all of her aristocratic pretensions," continued Enciso, "Adriana de Milá had little property of her own, and was wholly at the mercy of her more and more powerful uncle. That she did her work as tutor and governess well there can be no doubt. Under the teaching of this Valencian Orsini the four children of the rough-and-tumble Vannozza acquired all the distinction of mind and manner that was expected in those days in the offspring of the mighty. She must have been a severe and perhaps ill-tempered preceptress. As the Pope's children grew older and became celebrities in their own right, they never slighted their cousin and governess, but they always treated her with a certain rancorous coldness."

The South American diplomat thought a moment, and then resumed with a significant smile :

"This attitude of theirs may have been partly due to the role Doña Adriana was to play with their father. During the years just preceding his ascent to the Papacy, the period around 1489 that is, Rodrigo Borgia began to find the society of his niece Adriana exceedingly attractive. His children were no longer about. Giovanni and Cesare were away at school—Cesare at the University of Perugia, where he was studying literature and learning the arts of amusement in fashion at the time. Lucretia and Geoffrey were also living elsewhere, the former destined to an early marriage of political convenience. But there was someone left to make things interesting for the Cardinal at the Orsini Palace : a young girl of striking beauty, whose charms—among other things, an amazing head of blond hair—were already the talk of Rome. The girl was a frequent visitor at Adriana's house. Following a custom of the day, she had been matched, while still a mere child, to Adriana's son, Orsino Orsini. Julia Farnese—such was the young lady's name—was everywhere known as La Bella Giulia. Her worldly-wise gaiety and wit were as

remarkable as her beauty. She was only eighteen. The Cardinal, forty years her senior, might easily have been her father, or even her grandfather. The Princess Orsini at one perceived the deep impression Julia had made on the Cardinal. He was fifty-eight years old at the time—the period of grand passions for ageing libertines, when they seem to grow extremely susceptible to youthful beauty.

"Adriana may have been moved by her own aristocratic ambitions, or perhaps by a mother's devotion to the fortunes of her son. A woman of her shrewdness must have observed that many noble families owed their prosperity to the fact that some of their women had been mistresses of kings. Her uncle the Cardinal might easily become a king some day—not a few people regarded his eventual ascension to the pontificate as a foregone conclusion. The precocious Julia, never remarkable for ingenuousness, must have had similar thoughts. It would have flattered any woman living in Rome in those days to see herself courted by the most eminent of the Princes in the Sacred College. If she speculated in these directions, one must also add that she speculated soundly. Her relation with the future Pope, who might have been her grandfather, was the point of departure for the dizzy ascent to glory of the Farnese family. Up to that time the Farneses had been inconspicuous members of the poorer gentry. But from the day Julia became Rodrigo Borgia's mistress the family's fortune changed. Alexander the Sixth made a Cardinal of Alessandro Farnese, Julia's elder brother. When the appointment was made known wits of the Roman populace dubbed the new Prince of the Church 'Cardinal Petticoats'—the petticoats in question being both the petticoats of La Bella Giulia and those other petticoats which seemed to be the new Cardinal's exclusive preoccupation; for he led a life more scandalous and more violent than any of the Borgias. 'Cardinal Petticoats' lost no time in courtships, nor did he 'attract women like lodestone' as Rodrigo Borgia was credited with doing. Whenever he saw a woman who interested him he would carry her off by force regardless of the blood he might have to shed in order to obtain her. Years later this brother of La Bella Giulia became Pope under the name of Paul the Third. And so things went on for the Farnese family!"

last personage of note was Queen Isabel Farnese, who died 1758 on the throne of Spain!

"You may know, my dear Claudio, that this protégé of Pope Borgia was more fortunate than Borgia himself. The remains of Alexander the Sixth lie in an inconspicuous tomb in the Church of Monserrat, a Spanish establishment in Rome. The ashes of Paul the Third, "Cardinal Petticoats", are offered to the veneration of the Christian world in an imposing monument in the Cathedral of Saint Peter. At the foot of the sarcophagus stands a statue of Justice, a beautiful female figure entirely nude. It was Julia herself who posed for that statue. In later days the figure was covered with a metal garment to protect the faithful from undue shock."

Rodrigo Borgia became Pope at the very height of his passion for this youthful, shrewd, and calculating girl. Adriana de Milá-Orsini facilitated matters. She married Julia to her son, Orsino Orsini, and the day following the ceremony, which took place in the Cardinal's palace, the young husband departed for his castle at Bassanello, leaving Julia Farnese in Rome as lady-in-waiting to Lucretia Borgia, daughter of the Vice-Chancellor. She gave a first child to Rodrigo Borgia in 1492, on the eve of his election. In the language of the Roman populace La Bella Giulia had now become La Farnesina.

"What is harder to believe," said Claudio, "is that she gave him a second son, Giovanni Borgia, in the year 1498, when her protector was sixty-seven years old and had been Pope for five years!"

Was Julia Farnese really enamoured of Rodrigo Borgia? It would seem so. She was much more careless than her consecrated lover in obtruding their relation on public attention. Women of the aristocracy of the fifteenth century, Giulia Farnese and Adriana Orsini saw nothing sacrilegious in such connections with the Papacy. Julia was immensely flattered by the worldly satisfactions that came to her therefrom. She was envied, she was courted, she was flattered. Instead of shunning her in holy horror, people buried her in praises, adulations, prayers. Her favour was one of the certain roads that led to fortune. To be sure, there were men of ardent faith and lofty morality who decried the licence of the Papal Court. But people at large thought of such critics

as fanatical grumblers, unworthy of attention from serious people. Why get so excited about a Pope's private business? At the worst, the Pontiff's waywardness was the source of spicy stories and delicious wit!

As Alexander's reign went on and his policies aroused more and more hostility, insulting wall-scribblers and anonymous satires began calling La Farnesina "the Bride of Christ". But the sacrilegious epithet brought no tears to her eyes. Rather she laughed at it as a good joke, which, furthermore, flattered her pride. The important point with her was that the Farnese family was prospering under the protecting wing of the Church.

"One has to admit," the young Spaniard concluded in comment on the diplomat's narrative: "that Julia Farnese had discovered her career, and that she followed it successfully. She specialized in Popes. After Alexander's death, she became the mistress of Julius the Third, that Giuliano della Rovere who was the implacable foe of the Borgias. Through him she was able to make her brother, Alessandro Farnese, Pope Paul the Third! A Pope Farnese and a Queen Farnese! All thanks to Rodrigo Borgia and his inexhaustible amoroseness, well befitting the symbol of the red bull that pranced across the heraldic escutcheon of his family!"

CHAPTER IV

LUCRETIA MARRIES

"If Alexander the Sixth," Enciso continued, "had contented himself with ruling the Church without interfering in the political life of his time, the sins of his private life would have been forgotten, as was the case with other Popes. But a desire to strengthen the prestige of the Papacy, which, beyond the walls of Rome, was everywhere disregarded and disobeyed, did not permit him to live a life of indulgent selfishness. He was a Spaniard, furthermore; and Ferdinand the Catholic, the shrewdest statesman of that period, tried to use him as a tool, constantly rearing powerful adversaries against him and deserting him after getting him involved in dangerous enterprises. Critics who judge Rodrigo Borgia as a soulless politician, guided exclusively by personal interest, forget that he lived in an age of treacherous double-faced sovereigns: Louis the Twelfth of France; Ferdinand the Fifth of Spain; Henry the Seventh of England. As compared with these tricksters of such disconcerting duplicity and treason, Alexander the Sixth, and even Cesare Borgia, were honest and straightforward diplomats."

The new Pope first had to deal with his Italian States, which were living in utter anarchy. Angered at his rival's triumph, Giuliano della Rovere came to terms with the Kingdom of Naples, which had combated the Borgias from the days of Calixtus the Third. Naples, as well as Florence and other states, began annexing territories belonging to the Church. Hardly had Alexander taken his seat on the pontifical throne than Franceschetto Civo, scion of the late Pope, Innocent the Eighth, sold out to Virgilio Orsini, Captain-General of the King of Naples, and handed over the domains of Cervetta and Anghillara which he had received in fief from his parent.

Orsini himself did not possess the forty thousand ducats which were paid to Civo.

Everyone knew that the money came from the King of Naples, who had engineered the trade in order to get a foothold inside the Papal frontiers, and that the go-between in the operation was Giuliano della Rovere, whose motive was to embarrass his victorious adversary. In fact, the Sacred College was aroused at this treachery on the part of a Cardinal to the damage of Church interests. Rovere had to flee from Rome and shut himself up in the citadel at Ostia near the mouths of the Tiber, a fortress regarded as impregnable by the strategists of the epoch, and from which he could maintain easy communications with Naples.

Meanwhile Ludovico Sforza, surnamed The Moor, who was governing the Duchy of Milan as guardian of his cousin, Gian Galeazzo Sforza, was refusing to surrender the regency when the time fell due. Gian Galeazzo had married Isabel of Aragon, a lady related to the dynasty ruling in Naples. She accordingly appealed to Naples for help in securing possession of her husband's inheritance ; whereupon Ludovico the Moor turned to Charles the Eighth, son of the terrible Louis the Eleventh of France, inviting him to invade Italy and seize the crown of Naples, on which the French king held claims as heir of the Anjous.

Italy was a vast network of plots and counter-plots, and Alexander the Sixth had to manœuvre with the greatest agility, now combating Naples, now allying himself with the King of that realm, now disputing the claims of Charles the Eighth, now conceding them in public while resisting them in secret. Though Cesare Borgia was barely seventeen years old, his father had taken him into his house and counsel, keeping him in touch with the intrigues of Italian political life and setting great store on the boy's suggestions.

"To judge by the letters they have left us," Enciso explained, "these young Borgias were astonishingly precocious children. I am thinking, of course, of Cesare and Lucretia—Geoffrey Borgia was an insignificant individual wholly absorbed in amusement and vain display. Giovanni, the elder, was a handsome fellow, but blustering and fatuous. A man of great political talent himself, Rodrigo turned to Lucretia for

advice when she was fourteen years old. Cesare had studied at Perugia with two comrades, who also, at his father's request, acted as his guardians. Both were Spaniards : Juan Vera, a native of Valencia, a man of mature years, serving as a sort of governor ; and Francisco Remolino, from Ilerda, a youth of Cesare's own age. Cesare was interested especially in literary studies, and was something of a poet. He was still a student when his father assumed the tiara, and he did not take the trouble to return to Rome till the following year.

"That same Bocciardo, the Ambassador from Ferrara, who accurately analysed the forces at play in the Conclave which elected Alexander the Sixth, was a great friend of Cesare Borgia. He describes him as a nobleman of worldly fashion despite his title as Archbishop of Valencia and his imminent elevation to the Cardinalate. He went about clad in silks or in costly hunting-costumes, always with a sword at his belt. A mere wisp of hair cut close to the scalp did service as the required ecclesiastical tonsure. Bocciardo praises the good-nature and vivacious humour of the young man, along with a certain modesty in conversation which made him much more popular than his brother Giovanni, Duke of Gandia. One would think Bocciardo were describing a man of thirty-five or forty, so astute were the observations on public affairs which he attributes to Cesare Borgia—as I said, the latter at that time was seventeen years old."

To hold his ground against the Italian sovereigns, and protect the interests of the Church at the same time, Alexander had to make alliances. The King of Naples was his most dangerous foe, and he tried to fortify himself in that direction by marriages of his children.

"In following that policy," Claudio remarked, "he was only imitating his friend, Ferdinand the Catholic. Ferdinand married his daughters here and there about Europe for political reasons only, and without consulting their preferences or worrying to any great extent about their domestic happiness. The fate of Joan the Mad, who married Philip the Fair, and of Catherine of Aragon, who married Henry the Eighth of England, illustrate the private sorrows that are sometimes caused by such heartless diplomacy."

Before he was Pope, Cardinal Borgia had sought marriages

for Lucretia which he judged would increase the influence of the Borgia family. He was then in close touch with powerful nobles of Valencia, and had promised Lucretia's hand, when she was eight years old, to Don Querubín de Centelles, Lord of Ayora. When she was eleven years old he offered her to Don Gaspar de Prócida, Count of Almenara. Had Rodrigo never reached the Papal throne, Lucretia Borgia would have married one or the other of these noblemen in Valencia and returned to her native land to live a commonplace life as a respectable wife and mother, rearing many children, and turning to austere devotions as her beauty and her youth waned.

"And that," said Enciso, "may perhaps have been her true vocation, in spite of her brilliant social career and the lofty eminence she attained as consort of a reigning prince. She regularly wore sackcloth under her silken garments, and died in childbirth after rearing a large family."

"But her father's election diverted the course of her life far from the shores of Spain. Alexander could no longer think of wasting Lucretia so far away from home. He had only one daughter, and such a precious diplomatic instrument had to be used very sparingly! He paid the Count of Almenara a consolation fee of some twelve thousand modern pounds, to procure the annulment of the engagement which had been formally contracted. Then he married Lucretia to Giovanni Sforza, Lord of Pesaro, a tiny feudal domain belonging to the Holy See on the Adriatic.

To tell the truth, this match was in itself no more alluring than the two preceding, but the unpretentious Lord of Pesaro was nephew to Ascanio Sforza, Rodrigo's friend in the Sacred College, and nephew likewise to Ludovico the Moor, despot of Milan, who had good reason for sustaining the Papacy against Naples. The marriage took place in February, in the year 1493, with a stipulation that the bride and groom were not to see each other till at least a year had passed. Lucretia was then barely thirteen years old. Her husband was twenty-six. He appeared by proxy at the ceremony in Rome, remaining personally in his court at Pesaro, where the event was celebrated with great festivities.

"The Pope's Legate in Pesaro, a Bishop of the Church, presided over the ball which was held in the Castle. The

dancing lasted till daybreak, and then the Bishop transferred them to the public streets, leading a chain of guests in the movements of the *farandole* from one end of the city to the other. The modern mind can hardly grasp such a spectacle : a Papal Nuncio clad in his violet, 'calling' an all-night dance, and then hopping at the head of a riotous company of damsels and cavaliers about the streets of a town between crowds of commoners and plebeians who added their applause and acclamation to the rejoicing ! Yet at the time everyone thought it the most jovial thing in the world ! We cannot judge people and things in the past without entering into their spirit and coming to feel as they felt."

The King of Naples pricked up his ears at news of this union between Lucretia Borgia and a Sforza, which meant an alliance between the Papacy and the Duchy of Milan. Don Ferrante thought at once of a counter-move to restore his friendship with Alexander the Sixth. He suggested a marriage between Cesare Borgia and one of his own natural daughters. Two bastards regularly adopted and generously endowed might well serve the purposes of a diplomatic alliance in an age when many sovereign potentates could boast of births no more regular. The King of Naples was a bastard son of Alfonso the Magnanimous.

It was, furthermore, no secret that Cesare Borgia, Archbishop of Valencia, felt little calling for an ecclesiastical career. His father had been blindly following a family tradition : Giovanni Borgia should be the soldier, as Pedro Luis had been during the reign of Calixtus the Third ; Cesare, the second son, should be a cardinal, as he, Rodrigo, had been in his uncle's time ! But Cesare, clearly the most talented of any of the younger Borgias, was applying himself to military training despite his high offices in the Church, and he soon came to be, as his father had been before him, the best horseman in Rome. Likewise following in his father's footsteps, and as handsome a youth as Rodrigo had been, he began his career in love at the age of eighteen, tempted already by the licentious atmosphere about him, and by the attraction he already had for women. To women he owes most of the names that later panegyrists were to attach to his memory : "the blond Cæsar", "our Cæsar", "the only Cæsar".

Relations between Naples and the Holy See had been in this state of precarious balance ever since the pontificate of Calixtus the Third, and Alexander the Sixth continued the policy of balancing powers. Whenever the Pope became involved in difficulties, the King of Naples would turn against him. If the Pope won a point and appeared with strong support, Naples would at once make concessions to regain the friendship of Rome.

Under the influence of Ascanio Sforza, and with a natural eagerness to recover such possessions as had been usurped by the Neapolitan dynasty at the expense of the Holy See, Pope Borgia entered an alliance with Venice, Milan, and minor Italian States. The purpose of the league was to raise troops to attack Virginio Orsini and wrest from him the properties fraudulently expropriated by Civo, the son of Innocent the Eighth. To cement the coalition in which Ludovico the Moor represented the greatest effective strength, the real marriage between Lucretia and Giovanni Sforza was hastened. It took place in the month of June, long before the expiration of the year's delay which had been stipulated in the marriage contract. The event was celebrated by one of the most famous banquets of the time.

Giovanni Sforza entered Rome at the head of a brilliant cortège, riding between his two brothers-in-law, Giovanni and Cesare, who had gone out beyond the city walls to welcome him. Lucretia saw him come riding by from a balcony of her palace at Santa Maria in Portico, where she was living with Adriana, her former governess, and La Bella Giulia, her maid-of-honour. The Lord of Pesaro, a magnificent horseman, gracefully doffed his hat before her, and she returned the greeting to this husband whom she was seeing for the first time.

A hundred and fifty ladies of the Roman aristocracy, all the ambassadors, the notables of the city, eleven cardinals, and countless bishops, attended the feast in the Belvedere of the Vatican. Among the guests was Teodorina, a daughter of Innocent the Eighth, and her daughter, the Marquise Gerace. The children of defunct Popes continued holding honoured stations at the courts of succeeding Pontiffs. Their situation was somewhat comparable to that occupied by ex-Presidents

and their families in the republics of our day ; unless there be some positive animosity to prevent, they continue to appear at all functions given by their successors. Prominent also at this banquet was the whole tribe of the Farnesi which had come as escort to La Bella Giulia. For once the two pontifical families found themselves breaking bread together—the old family and the new family, the one descending from La Vannozza and the other developing about La Farnesina.

The merrymaking lasted till late into the night, and was followed by theatrical productions, comic and tragic, by recitations from poets, and finally by lascivious dances calculated to enflame amorous emotions in the guests. The last course was served at four o'clock in the morning, and consisted of fifty silver bowls filled with sweetmeats. Infesura, an implacable enemy of the Borgias, relates in his account of the event that it was the Pope himself who ordered the bonbons to be poured down the corsages of the female guests. Each lady had a cardinal or a potentate at her side, since the manners of the times required the separation of husband and wife at table. Each gentleman was left free, accordingly, to extract the almonds from the gown he found nearest at hand, the operation, as the chronicle says, giving rise to "uproarious laughter and immoderate palpings of breasts". Ambassadors who were actually present, and did not write from hearsay as Infesura did, reported to their home governments that the banquet lasted till dawn, and that everyone had a good time. They did not recount anything in particular to distinguish it from other celebrations of the period.

However, the marriage between the two young people continued a mere formality. The Pope decided that his daughter was still too young to found a family, and suggested that the contract be upheld, promising that at the end of the year Lucretia would be sent to Pesaro to live with her husband. For his part, Giovanni Sforza was in no hurry to obligate himself, as was shortly apparent. When Lucretia finally went to Pesaro, she filed formal complaint that she "had not been 'served' by her husband as she had a right to expect", and the marriage was eventually annulled on proof that it had never been consummated. This was the beginning of the matrimonial adventures of the famous Lucretia Borgia, described by

the enemies of her family as a monster unheard of since the days of Messalina, and slandered by the lies of her first husband, desirous of getting even for the insult to his manhood which the annulment constituted.

"For more than three centuries," Enciso concluded, "the world has thought this woman a criminal; yet she was a girl of gentle disposition with almost no will of her own. It was as though all the family energy, all the flaming passions and boiling rages of the Borgias, flowed in the veins of the male members of the line."

"It was Victor Hugo," added Borja, "who rather carelessly established the legend of Lucretia the Monster which had been invented by pamphleteers in the service of the feudal lords, the Roveres, and other enemies of Alexander the Sixth. In reality she had a girl's natural vanity to see her beauty and her pretty gowns admired. But she married and divorced as the policies of her father demanded, as any dutiful daughter of the period would have done. In the whole course of her life she may have had one or two serious love-affairs, but no more. Fortunately, this truth has been resurrected in our own days by the patient efforts of historians."

"Only in cheap novels can we now find the melodramatic Lucretia Borgia whom we knew as children. The rehabilitation of this Borgian princess was the work of two Protestants, the Englishman Roscoe, and the German Gregorovius, who turned directly to the documents of the time. They recovered her true likeness, which was rather that of one of the Graces of old than of the bloodthirsty Fury, going about with a dagger and a phial of poisons, which had been fashioned by the enemies of the Borgias."

Enciso de las Casas had read the original papers himself. Lucretia affected for the most part gowns of pure white with broad gold borders, loose flowing sleeves drawn in at the wrists with bracelets, in Spanish style, and around her throat a necklace of wonderful pearls. Pearls were always her delight and her aspiration, as was the case with her brother Cesare, though neither of them equalled their parent in enthusiasm for such precious gems. On many occasions, on coming to their audiences with the Pontiff, ambassadors would find him standing at a window feasting his eyes on the iridescence of some

necklace he was about to give to Lucretia. And when the Pope's daughter became Duchess of Ferrara one of her greatest joys was to inherit the famous necklace of pearls and rubies which had belonged to her mother-in-law.

All writers of the time praised Lucretia's beauty of feature, her graceful figure, her mouth, rather too large—a trait of the Borgias—but with fresh thick lips, her brilliant teeth, her full white breasts (in large part visible in accord with a fashion of the time), but above all else her kindly joyous smile. This buoyant good humour she inherited from her father, who was rarely downcast even at critical moments in his life, and was never grim even in his lusts. As her figure rounded out with the years she never lost a certain aristocratic lightness of movement. There was something bland about her, the reflection doubtless of a weak volition, without initiative. Superficial, light, spineless, incapable of resisting events, yielding to them rather, seeking happiness in momentary satisfactions of vanity, without energy to go beyond the enjoyments of the moment, Lucretia was ever a docile instrument in the hands of her family, living as a slave to her environment, and doing as people about her did.

But if she failed to inherit the wilfulness of the Borgias she possessed their talent. During her father's lifetime she showed considerable aptitude for political affairs, and even governed certain fiefs of the Church in the Pontiff's absence. Left in Ferrara, on Alexander's death, as wife to a rough soldier, Prince Alfonso d'Este, the Pope's daughter became "the pearl of brides", "the triumphant princess", "the holy Madonna Lueretia". The poet Ariosto sang her virtues. Titian, the painter, knew her well and admired her. She was just a woman and a wife, devoted to her children and to the management of her household, holding herself resigned and good-humoured before the infidelities of a rough and gruff husband who at bottom adored her.

Claudio liked to think of her as the girl identified as the model who sat for Pinturicchio's Saint Catherine—a graceful girlish face, suggesting indolence perhaps, framed by a magnificent shock of bright blond hair that looked like a halo of molten gold.

"On some occasions," he said, "Madonna Lucrezia, or as

the Pope said, in his habitual Spanish fashion, ‘Doña Lucrecia, my daughter’, held this luxuriant mass in a golden net with a gem set in each corner of its meshes. At other times, in pride at such glory, she would turn her tresses loose to fall in a torrent along her body to her feet. A braid of this golden fire, the relic of a true Spanish-Italian beauty, is still preserved in a library at Milan. Its brilliant colour has defied the passage of time. Three centuries after Lucretia’s death it was to throw Lord Byron into a deep poetic reverie.”

Enciso smiled sceptically :

“I am sorry to spoil the story, my dear Borja, but this attractive ancestor of yours was not a blonde. She was a Valencian brunette with that flat, lustreless, rice-coloured pallor of skin so common in the brunettes of the South. Cesare Borgia must likewise have had black hair, though the ladies of the day called him their ‘blond Cæsar’. At the most Lucretia’s may have been chestnut brown. But this did not prevent her from being blonde, a Venetian blonde, a blonde of liquid gold—poets and painters vied with each other in glorifying her flame-like tresses! But have things changed much in our time? Our ladies are surely aware that they have dyed their hair, yet they accept in good faith the praises of people quite as well informed as they as to their original colours. We live on conventions and illusions! What would we do if there were nothing but truth in the world?”

Alchemists of those days set a high price on recipes for golden hair. In Spain our famous “Mother Celestina” taught her pupils the use of a “golden bleach” to fill out other tricks of the trade. All the ladies of the time were blondes, even that valorous tomboy Catarina Sforza, whose gesture with her skirts on a famous occasion has come down through history as a sublime witticism. In fact, among papers of this Sforza Amazon which have survived to our time may be found a recipe for bleaching hair written out by herself in her own hand, that no other woman might obtain it. It calls for a mixture of wood-ash and barley straw boiled in water for twenty-four hours, the lye then to be drained off and boiled for twelve hours more with flowers and walnut leaves. One washing of the hair in this fluid the following morning was sufficient to give it a golden hue, though it had to be dried in the sunlight,

with all the incidental dangers of catching cold—whereat Madonna Lucrezia not infrequently complained.

"This treatment was one of the particular concerns of the Pope's daughter. She washed and dried her curls at least once a week. When she left Rome for the last time on her journey to meet her third and final husband at Ferrara, she spent twenty-seven days on the road. Every five days the slowly and majestically advancing procession halted in some village that Milady Lucrece might 'wash her head'; and princes, ambassadors, knights, squires, maids-of-honour, men-at-arms, would stand about clicking their heels all day while the new Princess of Ferrara would be sitting somewhere in the sunlight, her figure wrapped from neck to feet in a white silken smock, exceedingly thin and light (called a *sciaronetto*), and on her head a broad-brimmed hat made without a crown, through which her tresses were passed that the sun might play freely upon them without tanning her neck or hurting her eyes. Coquette that she was, Lucretia claimed that this weekly session was necessary to relieve a chronic headache. It is evident, to the contrary, that baking in the hot sun must have been the cause rather than the cure, or, at any rate, made such a malady worse.

"It is certain that Cesare Borgia also dyed his beard—for that maxillary adornment had just come into fashion again. In the days of the Borgias young men were letting their beards grow in contradistinction to their fathers, who all through the fifteenth century had maintained the smooth face sanctioned by Roman Antiquity. It was the Humanists who first revived the fashion of the full beard, in imitation of the Greek poets and philosophers. Its adoption by Charles the Fifth and Francis the First made it general throughout Europe again.

"Lucretia Borgia," Enciso continued, "was every bit a woman, enamoured of pretty things, whether gowns or jewels. No lady of her time could boast of such a wardrobe, and any one of her costumes was worth a fortune, in the terms of her day. Indolent, passive, unassertive, she was a person, nevertheless, of remarkable intellectual gifts. She read, wrote and spoke Italian, French, Greek and Latin, not to mention Castilian and Valencian, which were her mother-tongues. She also knew some German, though her proficiency in that language was

never as great as in the others. In some of these she wrote very passable verse. All the members of this vigorous, active clan seem to have had a dash of poetry. Cesare read and composed verse at the University of Perugia, while Doña Tecla de Borja, a sister of Alexander the Sixth, was enough of a poet to win the praises of Ausius March, the famous Catalonian troubadour. On her death all the poets in Italy burst into versified tears."

This allusion reminded Claudio of his uncle, the Canon Figueras. Tecla de Borja was the Tecleta who figured in so many of the Canon's stories as playing with her brother Rodriguet, the future Pope, in the Borja manor at Játiva.

But Enciso had drifted back to the political adventures of Alexander the Sixth.

"The King of Naples grew alarmed on finding the Pope allied with his adversaries, and sought aid of his illegitimate cousin, Ferdinand the Catholic, that the latter might exert some pressure on the policies of the Vatican. Taking improper advantage of the Pope's nationality, Ferdinand reminded Alexander that as a Spaniard he was a liegeman of the Spanish Crown, and served notice through the Spanish Ambassador in Rome that since the dynasty of Naples was the creation of his uncle, Alfonso the Magnanimous, he, Ferdinand, considered it as part and parcel of his own family. It is only fair to remember that at first Rodrigo Borgia had a real affection for Ferdinand and Isabel, sovereigns of rather dubious legitimacy, whom he had helped personally in the early days of their marriage, when they were only princes.

"The moment he ascended the Papal throne he recognized the fall of Granada by bestowing on them the title of 'Catholic Sovereigns', which has become hereditary to this day among the monarchs of Spain; and everything that Ferdinand asked him he made haste to grant, among other things the Mastership of the military Orders, which carried conspicuous incomes with them. Pope Borgia always gave the Catholic Sovereigns more than they gave him. It was continual pestering on Ferdinand's part that finally inclined Alexander, on the advice of Cesare Borgia, to turn toward the King of France, who was more deferential toward the Pope and other members of the Borgia family.

"Alexander admired Isabel as one of the most beautiful and virtuous among the great ladies of her time. With a woman's devotion to fine clothes and costly gems, she was above reproach on the side of her private life, and even pushed her scruples to extremes of austerity. Whenever her husband was absent, even for a night, she would have her bed set up in a great hall and sleep there surrounded by her children and ladies of her court—'Maids of the Coverlet', *cobijeras*, they were called, since it was their function to supervise the slumber of the sovereign. Such precautions kept her ever free from gossip at a time when scandal was the rule rather than the exception among the powerful. In the heroes who fought the Moors under her command she inspired ideal, romantically hopeless passions. They all professed chivalrous, uncarnal love for this beautiful 'Lady of their Thoughts', a queen authentically blonde, with great, deep, blue eyes.

"With Ferdinand, the Pope was on terms of roguish intimacy. He would often make jocular allusion to the growth of the King's illegitimate family, which bade fair to overtake his own; and he looked after the bastards of the Spanish royal house, making one of them Archbishop of Saragossa, when he himself was only Vice-Chancellor, and the future King still heir-pretender to the Crown of Aragon. As time went on, other royal princes 'on the left' came to possess ecclesiastical benefices, while daughters found comfortable berths in convents.

"On this occasion the new Pontiff unselfishly yielded to the pressure of the Catholic monarch. His real interests would have counselled fidelity to his alliance with Milan and Venice, behind which the King of France lurked in hiding. The combination in the North was a serious menace, for Charles the Eighth was gathering a large force to invade Italy and seize the Kingdom of Naples. The austere Savonarola, who was a good deal of a charlatan, as most prophets are, had been secretly informed of the French expedition and kept predicting it in his sermons as a revelation which God had made to him for the punishment of the Pope and of the tyrant ruling in Naples.

"It was at this critical moment that Ferdinand asked Pope Borgia to abandon the stronger party and side with a monarch

who was about to lose his throne. Alexander accepted, nevertheless, and the two kings tried to compensate him for his rash decision by seductive offers. Geoffrey Borgia, the youngest of the Pope's children, would marry Doña Sancha, a natural daughter of Alfonso of Aragon, heir-apparent to the Neapolitan crown, who would bring in dowry the principality of Squillace and the county of Cagliata in Calabria. Ferdinand, on his side, proposed that Giovanni Borgia, second Duke of Gandia, marry Doña María Enriquez, his own cousin, who had been affianced of yore to the late Pedro Luis, first Duke of Gandia (Alexander's first illegitimate child). Meantime Don Ferrante of Naples strove to smooth out the quarrels he had previously been hatching between one individual or another and the Pope. Cardinal Giuliano della Rovere made peace with Alexander and sat down with cynical readiness at the Pope's table.

"Virginio Orsini likewise made advances, and at the King's bidding paid over thirty-five thousand ducats for the title to the Church lands he had 'bought' of Franceschetto Civo. It was a love-feast all around, and Giovanni Borgia set sail on a Spanish galley with princely retinue and a great treasure in jewels to celebrate his wedding with Ferdinand's cousin at Valencia. A few days later Geoffrey Borgia was married by proxy to Doña Sancha de Aragon, the actual consummation of the wedding being postponed, as had been done in the case of Lucretia; for Sancha was fourteen years old and Geoffrey twelve! In all this the Pope had been confronted with two alternatives: on the one hand, the danger of a French invasion, still remote; on the other, the more immediate threat of an invasion of the Papal States by the King of Naples, secretly supported by the King of Spain. He had optioned, in the end, to exorcise the latter, since by doing so he could obtain brilliant matches for two of his sons.

"At just this juncture an envoy from Charles the Eighth arrived in Rome to secure from the Pontiff, whom the French King still regarded as an ally, the investiture of the Kingdom of Naples. This would have justified the French attack. But Alexander was already compromised beyond recall with the Neapolitan monarch. He could only put the Ambassador off with detours and vague promises.

"The Pope had married three of his children, Lucretia, Geoffrey, and the Duke of Gandia, all in one year; and the enormous expenses incident to the ceremonies had all but emptied his treasury. The only money he had in sight was the thirty-five thousand ducats paid by Virginio Orsini, and they had come, when all was said and done, from Naples. In this emergency he had recourse to a device used before him by other Popes: wholesale promotions to the Sacred College. He created eleven cardinals at a Consistory which met in the month of September 1493. Two of them paid nothing for their new honours, since they belonged to the Pope's own family: the one, Alessandro Farnese, the future Paul the Third, and the other, Cesare Borgia, who was just eighteen years old on donning the purple. The public paid little attention to the nomination of Cesare—that was a natural manifestation of paternal regard, such as other Popes had shown. Not so the brother of La Bella Giulia, who had made his way into the Sacred College by the shadiest and the most devious of routes! The jests and comments were endless. It was at this time that Farnese acquired his sobriquet as 'Cardinal Petticoats'.

"The extraordinary career of this Borgia Pope," Enciso remarked, "shows a strange mixture of the petty with the grand, of the trivial or obscene with the marvellous and the historic. One day Alexander received news that 'a man named Christopher Columbus' had set out from Spain with three ships and a handful of Spaniards to reach the lands of the Grand Khan of Tartary in the farthest East by sailing west cross the ocean, and that the said Columbus had actually reached outlying islands of the eastern world, and come home again with specimens of gold and spice. And people began arguing at once as to whether these new lands, inhabited by naked savages and showing only a rudimentary civilization, really belonged to Asia or to some entirely new world which no one had ever visited before."

"Alexander was not a scientist, but as a youth he had read widely and filled his library with all the books, whether printed or in manuscript, which were famous at the time. He had often discussed cosmography with Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini, the Pope whose treatises on geography Columbus had read in making preparations for his voyage. Alexander at once took

an interest in the new lands, and organized, under the leadership of Father Boil, a Catalonian monk, a mission of Spanish friars to convert them to Christianity. But just before that the Pope had demonstrated his title to credit as the real Pope of Discovery by dispatching a party of missionaries to rediscover and reconvert Greenland. The land lying to the extreme north of America had been known to Scandinavian sailors as early as the tenth century, and they had actually founded Christian missions there (destined to perish in the end). It was during the first months of Alexander's pontificate, at the very time when Spanish friars were rearing temples of masonry and brick under the tropical sun of the Antilles, that Catholic missionaries set out again for the cold North to raise their poor wooden churches in the Arctic Seas."

As Claudio seemed about to interrupt, Enciso anticipated his thought:

"Yes, I know what you are going to say. It was in fact Rodrigo Borgia who made the greatest division of territories known to the world's history. In all the period between Alexander the Great and Napoleon Bonaparte, no conqueror ever cut up the face of the earth in so offhand a fashion or marked off greater territories on the earth's surface with a dash of the pen. At the time, sailors from the Iberian Peninsula were darting out into all the unknown world, the Portuguese sailing east, the Spaniards west, but both of them looking for the so-called Indies, the marvellous lands of the Grand Khan described by Marco Polo and Mandeville. Columbus's discovery filled the Portuguese with alarm, and relations between the sovereigns of Spain and Portugal were growing seriously strained.

"If the two states were not to be thrown into future wars, some agreement had to be reached whereby their respective zones of discovery would be clearly defined. In the light of his own readings and of the counsel of expert geographers and sailors, Pope Borgia drew, strangely enough, a line from North to South to the westward of the Cape Verde Islands, dividing the terraqueous globe, as he thought, into two hemispheres, everything to the east of the 'Alexandrine Line' being for the Portuguese, everything to the west for the Spaniards. Both could go on sailing if they chose, provided they kept to the

prescribed route, until they met on the opposite side of the planet."

Enciso, however, in defence to his Spanish patriotism, hastened to discount the importance of the Pope's partition:

"Many authors abroad, who do not know our history as well as we do, have thought that the Pope took a very radical step in the field of science in thus dividing the world; and it does seem to be a fact that this act of Pope Borgia is the first official recognition of the sphericity of the earth on the part of the Church of Rome. None of the Popes preceding had ever adverted to the point. But more praise than that he does not deserve. It would seem to imply that people at the time did not believe that the world was round, and that the discovery of that fact was made by Columbus and the sages of the Vatican. As you well know, centuries before the Christian era Ptolemy and Eratosthenes had proved the sphericity of the earth, and actually measured its circumference in figures fairly close to the dimensions established by modern science.

"Later on the Moorish geographer Alfagram restated and verified the proof. The Moors of Spain had been teaching the doctrine of sphericity in their schools for centuries, and, through the Spanish Jews, Arab geography had become a commonplace with the scientists of the Christian world. To be sure, in the early centuries of Church history some of the Fathers had denied the possibility of antipodes and regarded the doctrine of sphericity as absurd. The mystical geography of the Byzantine monk, Cosmos Indicopleustes, was widely diffused in the earlier Middle Ages. But beginning with the thirteenth century, the dawn of the Renaissance, it was in Spain, country of Jews, Christians, and Moors, that widest acceptance of the so-called 'sphere' prevailed.

"Instead of being the victim of Spanish ignorance, as many writers have carelessly supposed, Columbus was the ignorant person as compared with the scholars who had occasion to pass on his plans. Columbus was not so certain the world was spherical. He thought rather that it was pear-shaped, with the Earthly Paradise located on the narrow end where the stem would be. He also thought that, of the seven parts of the world, six were land and one water. Indeed, when some Spanish churchmen were criticizing Columbus's project of

going westward to Asia on traditional grounds, citing the authority of Saint Augustine and other sacred writers, who had denied that the world was a sphere, a Spanish bishop replied sharply: ‘Saint Augustine and other most worshipful saints are authorities in theological matters, but they can in no sense be so regarded in matters of geography.’”

There was a moment’s silence, and then Claudio observed thoughtfully:

“In any event, it was an interesting and pretty gesture on the part of Lucretia Borgia’s father to cut the world in two chunks that way. It shows the prestige the Papacy still enjoyed in spite of the private lives of Borgia and many of his predecessors. Alexander cut the world in two as simply as he would have halved an apple on his table! The Pope was still somebody! But, unluckily for him, a little Augustinian friar was just then beginning to stir around in Germany—a man named Martin Luther!”

CHAPTER V

"THE WAR OF FORNICATION"

ENCISO stepped to one of the windows of his library and looked out into the street.

"It's raining!" he said. "You had better not go out just now! Let's have another cigar!"

In fact, streets and roof-tops were shining under a thick, fine rain that prematurely darkened the sky of the late afternoon. Claudio had risen to take his departure. He sat down in his chair again, touching a match to a big cigar which the diplomat offered him. He might stay at the most a half-hour longer, to see whether the shower might pass.

"The year 1494," said Enciso, after a period of silence, "proved to be the most dangerous of Pope Borgia's career. Toward the end of February, King Don Ferrante, the Valencian bastard who had become head of the Aragonese dynasty in Naples, suddenly died, and his heir, Alfonso the Second, hastened to seek aid of the Pope, the only sovereign in Italy who was in a position to help him. The young man was greatly worried by the expedition of Charles the Eighth. He would be embarrassed in meeting it, because of the hostility of the nobility and the populace of Naples, whom his father had alienated by harsh measures."

"Again Alexander found himself in a painful dilemma. The King of France was sending ambassadors, threatening to call a Church Council and deprive him of the tiara in case he did not join France. Giuliano della Rovere had turned away from Naples, and was beginning to work for the French monarch. Meantime the Pope was in danger of losing his most intimate friend, Cardinal Ascanio Sforza, who was bound to the French cause through his blood-relationship to the tyrant of Milan. Borgia tried ineffectually to gain time, on the one hand by

sending the Golden Rose to Charles the Eighth in token of friendship, and on the other by promising to accord investiture to the New King of Naples in order to placate Ferdinand the Catholic.

"Alfonso understood the Pope's predicament, and saw that Alexander would have gained the more by deserting the Neapolitan dynasty. He therefore ratified the agreements his father had reached with the Borgias, even making them more attractive than they had been. Doña Sancha would marry the little Geoffrey Borgia and bring him, in addition to the principality of Squillace, forty thousand ducats' income, and a regiment of a hundred men-at-arms for her personal guard. Sancha's dowry would be two hundred thousand ducats. Giovanni, Duke of Gandia, Alexander's eldest son, would receive the principality of Tricarico, in the Basilicata, from the King's hands; and on Cesare Borgia, who had just become a subdeacon quite unwillingly, would be bestowed a number of lucrative benefices in Neapolitan territory.

"In April the Pope sided resolutely with Naples, and ordered his nephew, Giovanni Borgia, Cardinal of Monreale, to place the crown on Alfonso's head. Geoffrey Borgia went in the retinue of the Cardinal to consummate his marriage with Doña Sancha. Five days later, on the night of the twenty-fourth of April, Giuliano della Rovere put to sea from Ostia, leaving his brother Giovanni to defend the castle at the entrance to the Tiber. He made Genoa, and thence passed on to France as envoy of Ludovico the Moor, to urge Charles the Eighth to hasten the invasion. Alexander called Count Pitigliano to Rome, and ordered him to lay siege to the castle at Ostia; and though the fortress was generally regarded as impregnable, it fell in a month's time.

"For several weeks the Pope had ample satisfaction for his paternal vanities, and was free to enjoy the delights of a moment's peace which crept as a sort of breathing-space into the rush of events in that dangerous year.

"Geoffrey's wedding took place at Naples, with great display, on the seventh of May. The bride's father seized this opportunity to gain prestige with populace and nobility and inspire confidence in those who were faltering, by giving great splendour to the nuptial ceremonies, as a means of suggesting

that his alliance with the Pope was adequate guarantee against the French invasion.

"The youngest of the Borgias soon discovered that he had fallen into the clutches of one of the most insatiable of women. Doña Sancha, a woman of Neapolitan and Spanish blood, died before she was twenty-six years old of sheer exhaustion through amorous excesses."

"To this Sancha," said Claudio, "must be traced the evil reputation which rested on the passive and gracious Lucretia over a period of three centuries. In order to discredit the Borgia family, Alexander's enemies attributed to his daughter the debaucheries of his daughter-in-law, and the writers of the Reformation, prey to their religious hatreds, were at no pains to correct the error. When, two years after their marriage, the Prince and Princess of Squillace returned from Naples to Rome to take up residence in the Vatican, Doña Sancha was in the full blaze of her precociously perverse temperament. She set no bounds to her dissoluteness, and seemed to find added zest for her pleasures in the scandal they provoked. She made public parade of her affairs with her two brothers-in-law, Giovanni and Cesare; and, whatever the reserves of which they were conscious, they proved vain before Sancha's cynical delight in boasting of her escapades to all the world. Her one restraint in a career which seems to have embraced most of the prominent dignitaries, whether ecclesiastical or lay, about the Papal Court, was never to set her cap for her father-in-law, the Pope—in spite of his advancing years.

"Alexander was still the good-natured dandy and *viveur* he had always shown himself in the gay life of the Vatican. In reality, Alexander was shocked at the effronteries of his daughter-in-law, perhaps because of the sad situation in which they placed Geoffrey, his son. That young man seemed to be satisfied so long as the Fury he had married left him alone. In his later days the Pope lost patience and shut the woman up in the Castle of Sant' Angelo, in order to put an end to the ribald comments to which her ostentatious immodesties continually exposed the Court of Rome.

"The day after this wedding the Cardinal of Monreale crowned Alfonso the Second in a ceremony of great splendour—and the Pope immediately found that he had stirred up a

hornets' nest! Ascanio Sforza now deserted him, as Rovere had done. The two Cardinals had always been implacable foes. Now they came to an understanding to oppose the Pope—Giuliano, as a protégé of the King of France, Ascanio as brother to Ludovico Sforza, tyrant of Milan. But Alexander's own house was thrown into sudden confusion. Under suasion of Cardinal Sforza, all the Roman gentry who had received states in fief from the Holy See rose in rebellion—the Colonnas, the Orsinis, the Savellis, and numberless others, and made common cause with Milan and Charles the Eighth. At this moment more than half of Italy stood in arms against the Pope, his one support being the King of Naples, who was really leaning on him, since the plebs and the barons of Naples could be relied on to revolt the moment the French army drew near.

"Alexander now perceived that he had embarked on a mistaken policy, though really he had understood it all along. A desire to favour the King of Spain had been more influential with him than even his ambitions for his children. At this critical juncture Ferdinand was sending protestations of friendship and prayers for the Pope's salvation, but without soldier or penny to give them point.

"Alexander's first thought in the crisis was for the safety of his family. Lucretia Borgia was living in Pesaro with her husband, for Giovanni Sforza, nephew to the Duke of Milan, could not remain in Rome a moment after the Pope had deserted the league of the Milanese and the Venetians to join the King of Naples. The young man thought it safer to be at some distance from the Eternal City, on land of his own, and Alexander permitted him to take his wife with him. Looking forward to the coming invasion, the Pope could well fear for La Bella Giulia, La Varozza, Doña Adriana de Milá, and the other women of his entourage. They followed Lucretia to Pesaro on pretext of passing the summer on the Adriatic shore. The only one of the children to remain in Rome was Cesare, who stood at his father's side with a composure and clear-headedness quite improper to his years.

"The Pope then began to take desperate measures to meet the on-coming storm. Venice had important interests involved in the Levant. Alexander therefore sent a secret

agent, a certain Bocciardo, to the Grand Turk, urging him to advise the Government at Venice to take the side of Naples. The fact that the Pope still had the Pretender, Djem, in his power, gave a certain force to this request. At the same time Bocciardo begged Bajazet, the chief of Islam, to advance a year's payment on his brother's board in Rome—the pension of forty thousand ducats would come in very handy in defending the Church from the French invasion. Meantime Charles the Eighth was cloaking his warlike preparations under a counterfeit air of devoutness. After occupying the Kingdom of Naples he intended, he said, to go on to Constantinople and Jerusalem—the ever-recurring dream of the Crusade—though neither he nor one of his captains had any idea of keeping such a promise.

"The Pope met Alfonso in conference on the Neapolitan frontier to examine ways and means of resisting the invaders by arms. Alexander and the young Cardinal Cesare were for taking the offensive and attacking the French while their army would be more or less scattered on the march. But Alfonso was afraid to strip his Kingdom of his scanty troops, lest the country rise in revolt behind him.

"The French King crossed the frontier of Savoy on the third of September, at the head of fifteen thousand knights and men-at-arms, eight thousand Gascon musketeers, six thousand Swiss halberdiers, fifteen hundred French crossbow-men, and a hundred and fifty pieces of artillery. This agglomeration of armed men, the largest that had ever been seen in the memory of people of those days, had neither tents, nor provisions, nor money. The troops were to live on the cities they conquered—IItaly was a land of plenty! This mob of Frenchmen made its way southward in the same state of mind in which the hungry and tattered regiments of the Republic, three centuries later, were to look down from the passes of the Alps upon the promised land pointed out to them by the youthful Buonaparte.

"Charles the Eighth, degenerate scion of the terrible Louis the Eleventh, was an ugly, bandy-legged, unintelligent creature, prey to insatiable appetites. His Italian campaign turned out to be a pretext on his part for sampling new women and adding the savour of violations to lustful exercise. The campaign could not have been easier, nor could it have

provided greater enjoyments. The huge army marched the length of the Peninsula without once unsheathing its arms, and finally, on reaching Naples, it gave itself over to uninterrupted debaucheries. Only on its way home did it have to stand a real battle, and that in order to fight its way out! Rightly did satirists of the time describe this adventure of Charles the Eighth, surnamed 'The Obstinate', as the 'War of Fornication'. The King and his thirty thousand men did little else. Two female sovereigns, the Duchess Blanche of Savoy and the Marquise of Monferrat, opened the gates of the Peninsula to the youthful conqueror. The one received him splendidly at Turin, and the second at Casale—at both places triumphal entries without fighting, then joustings and tourneys as the prelude to great banquets.

"If the French monarch and his paladins crossed the Alps with the idea of making female conquests, the beautiful ladies of Italy were equally ready to be conquered. The documents of the time, both private and official, stress the incredible revelries that featured the march all along its course. Charles repaid the hospitality of the Duchess and the Marchioness by borrowing their jewels with utmost frankness and pawning them to pay the wages of his troops. Then the orgy moved on into the territory of Milan.

"The young wife of Gian Galeazzo threw herself at the King's feet, protesting that Ludovico the Moor, a usurper, was holding her husband, the King's nephew, prisoner, in order to retain control of the government. Charles the Eighth wept tears of sorrow at the rehearsal of such a just complaint. Ludovico, however, had opened the Peninsula to the French, just as he was now opening Milan. The King dried his tears and marched on. Shortly afterward Galeazzo was poisoned by his uncle, that the widow might have no further cause for lament.

"The invading army advanced from Milan to Florence, welcomed in all the towns as it had been in Turin: *fiestas*, tournaments, banquets, women, and, on departure, loans of money. Cesare Borgia left Rome, shut himself up in Orvieto, a city entrusted him by his father, and took measures for its defence. This son of a Spaniard, born in Rome, was beginning to evince an Italian pride, of which most of his countrymen seemed

entirely destitute. While everyone was yielding to the invader, and the women of the Italian aristocracy were adding shame to the general cowardice, he, Cesare Borgia, was the only one to make armed protest! Orvieto closed its gates, the only town to do so along all the road to Naples. The French wave beat unsuccessfully against the citadel and finally rolled on.

“While Charles the Eighth was advancing from Florence toward Rome, two great misfortunes came upon the Pope, who was now left quite alone.

“Bocciardo, his secret agent to the Turks, landed near Ancona on the Adriatic with a Turkish envoy, carrying the forty thousand ducats advanced for Djem’s support. Both emissaries fell into the hands of a band captained by Giovanni della Rovere, the Cardinal’s brother, who had been expelled from the Castle of Ostia. He took the forty thousand ducats and let the Sultan’s Ambassador go. Bocciardo, however, he kept a prisoner, and sent him with all the papers captured on his person to Cardinal Giuliano, who was travelling in the retinue of the French king. Djem’s pension went to defray the expenses of the French campaign, and Cardinal Giuliano kept the documents, altered them in the proper sense, and then published them in order to discredit his adversary. His forgeries carried a slander worthy of his violent character. He pretended that Bajazet had asked the Pope to murder Djem and was offering three hundred thousand ducats in exchange for his brother’s corpse.

“That lie was too crude,” said Claudio, “and never produced the effect Giuliano desired. Bajazet, for his part, might have been capable of making such a proposal. During Borgia’s pontificate, and the preceding, he had tried a number of times to have his brother killed, now by Turkish agents, now by hired Italian assassins. But it was to the Pope’s interest to keep Djem safe and sound. To have the Turkish Pretender at his disposal was an instrument for keeping the Turk in hand and collecting annually a pension of forty thousand ducats. To have murdered him would have been to kill the goose of the golden eggs, for the cost of Djem’s maintenance was not a tenth of the amount received.”

“No one paid attention to Giuliano’s charge at the time,”

Enciso added; "there is no doubt of that! But a century later Protestant historians took up the forgotten slander and accused Pope Borgia of killing Djem. As a matter of fact, the Turkish Pretender did die some months later, but as a result of alcoholic excesses, which he carried beyond all bounds while in the hands of Charles the Eighth.

"When the King reached Lucca he met Cardinal Piccolomini, nephew to Pius the Second, a kindly, compromising sort of man who had been selected by the Pope to make terms, if possible, with the invaders. But everybody knew the desperate plight Alexander was in. He had no means of resistance. All his friends had deserted him. His very life was in danger. The Roman barons, now in revolt, were waiting only for a favourable occasion to seize the Pope's capital and perhaps put him to death. The King, therefore, refused to talk with Piccolomini, asserting that he needed no go-betweens in dealing with the Pope. He would discuss matters with Alexander personally during the festivities of Christmastide, by which time he thought he would be in Rome."

The other disappointment was of a more personal character. In the month of November La Bella Giulia took it into her head to leave the shelter of Lucretia's castle at Pesaro for a trip to Viterbo, where her brother, the Cardinal, was living at the moment. With her went a sister-in-law, and Doña Adriana de Milá. A company of French horsemen commanded by Ives d'Allègre (later to be Cesare Borgia's companion-in-arms) came upon the cortège of the three ladies and took them prisoner, demanding, as was the custom, a ransom for their release. In those days the distinctions between warfare and banditry were not very clearly drawn.

Though the French commander spoke enthusiastically of Julia's beauty to the King, Charles refused to see her—a decision hard to understand in a man who had evinced the curiosity of an insatiable connoisseur in everything pertaining to Italian complexions. Perhaps Cardinal della Rovere and other Italians in the King's suite prevented his meeting the fair booty in fear lest her pleadings swing the French monarch to Alexander's side.

The Pope, at any rate, showed all the anxieties of a doting

lover on learning of what had happened, and began immediate and varied negotiations to effect the liberation of the captives. He despatched the three thousand ducats demanded by the French captain, and sent two Cardinals to King Charles to protest the capture as unchivalrous and procure the King's Order for a release. The three ladies were straightway forwarded to Rome under heavy escort, and Juan Marrades, the Pope's chamberlain and private secretary, rode forth to meet them beyond the city walls. This "Babylonian captivity" had lasted just four days, and provoked immense amusement throughout Italy as an episode worthy of the "War of Fornication".

Ludovico the Moor, in Milan, filed his protest too, but at the absurd amount of the ransom with which the French Captain had rested content.

"Three thousand ducats?" he cried. "You were crazy! His Holiness would have given ten times as much—for all I know, a hundred times as much—to regain possession of his beautiful concubine!"

Meantime the French army was advancing on Rome from the north, while from the south came the army of the King of Naples. The Pope could have little confidence in the latter, since its commander, the Duke of Calabria, was advising him to abandon his capital and take refuge at Naples. Alexander did not know what to do. His temper unruffled, his confidence unshaken, he seemed to be looking for some favourable turn in events, though he could not imagine whence it might come—the King and Queen of Spain had involved him in his present predicament, but were still aiding him only with comforting words. At one moment he made up his mind to flee in order not to fall into the hands of Charles the Eighth, who would surely force recognition of his claims to the throne of Naples. But it was too late! French scouts were already galloping about the Campagna, and from the very windows of the Vatican the Pope could see them on the heights of Monte Mario. The Castle at Sant' Angelo had been much neglected by preceding Popes and was in no condition to offer serious resistance.

"A real Calvary of a month's duration was in store for the Pope," said Enciso; "but such a bitter trial was only to

demonstrate that greatness in character and diplomacy which was to bring him victorious through so many dangers."

He consented to the French King's entrance into Rome, but on condition that the invading troops keep to the left bank of the Tiber. By late December a few detachments of the French army were already lodged in Rome, outside the Leonine City, where they were guilty of the same outrages which they had perpetrated in other Italian towns, especially outrages against women. Meantime the French monarch was consulting his astrologers in order to select the most favourable day for his entry into the Eternal City. The Festival of Saint Sylvester was finally designated, and Charles marched into Rome on the 31st of December, the enemies of the Borgias taking it for granted that Alexander's tiara was as good as gone. Indeed, Cardinal della Rovere and other prelates in the royal escort began making plans for the Conclave that would depose Alexander the Sixth and name his successor.

The Pope listened patiently to the arrogant envoys of the monarch. They were not modest in their demands. They would have the immediate delivery of Prince Djern, and the transfer of the Castle of Sant' Angelo to a French garrison. The Pontiff should give Charles immediate investiture as King of Naples and legitimatize the descent of that throne within his family. Cesare Borgia must surrender to the French and accompany them as a hostage till Naples should be conquered.

In the face of such terms, formulated in rude and peremptory language, it would have seemed that Alexander had only two alternatives: either to accept, in humiliating resignation, or break off negotiations with an abrupt refusal. The crafty Pontiff did neither of these things. He began arguing the issues one by one, putting off decisions as long as possible. When confronted with an ultimatum to say "Yes" or "No", he would suffer a fainting spell, and the matter would have to go over till the following day.

When the French besiegers withdrew from before Orvieto, Cesare Borgia set forth from that refuge and, by one of those surprising rides which he was to use later in his campaigns, managed to reach his father's side. At his suggestion the Pope took the one energetic measure possible in the circumstances. On the 7th of January Alexander and his Cardinals

secretly made their way to the Castle of Sant' Angelo through the underground passage that led from the Vatican, and posted themselves in that fortress in demeanour of desperate defence. The Pope's prestige was still so great that the King dared neither attack him nor depose him, as Rovere, Sforza, and other enemies of the Borgias advised. He was afraid of the shock such a violent act might cause at home in France and in other countries. Alexander, on his side, perceived that the Castle would hardly be able to resist an assault conducted in earnest.

As a result, both parties stood ready for compromise. Negotiations were resumed and brought to a conclusion a week later. The terms represented a virtual triumph for the Pontiff, whom everyone had considered lost a few days before. Prince Djem was handed over to the King of France for the duration of the expedition against the Turks, but meantime the Pope was to continue receiving the forty thousand ducats from the Sultan. Cesare Borgia would accompany the French King on his campaign for a period of four months, not, however, as a hostage, but as Papal Legate, with all the honours due to such a high office. A French garrison would occupy Civita-Veccchia while the King's army was crossing the Papal States, and Cardinal della Rovere would be readmitted to the citadel of Ostia. The Pope, for his part, would continue holding the Castle of Sant' Angelo, receive public testimonial of obedience from the French King, be left free to govern his States without interference, and be guaranteed by the French monarch against attack. Not a word as to the Neapolitan succession, the point which Borgia was so eager to avoid! This omission, taken together with the King's oath of obedience, was a signal diplomatic victory for Alexander —a triumph of his spiritual authority!

He went back to his palace through the same secret passageway, and now welcomed the King with great majesty, so impressing the youthful monarch, indeed, at their first meeting, and so charming him afterwards in private conversation, that Charles did not bring up the question of Naples but decided to defer the issue till another time. He needed to be off from Rome at the earliest possible moment! The French army had consumed all the provisions available in the

city and its environs. Famine was threatening. The Roman populace could not endure the arrogance of the invaders. Riots and bloodshed were occurring daily. Groups of Spanish residents were in arms and attacking the insolent invaders at every street crossing. The Swiss halberdiers were special marks of popular fury. These burly mountaineers were great drinkers and pursued and violated women even in the public streets. The girls of the Roman populace were showing themselves much less conquerable than the ladies of a higher world.

The King left Rome at the head of his troops on the 28th of January, in the year 1495. At his right hand rode Cesare Borgia, the red cloak of a Cardinal thrown over his armour. He had accepted this appointment as Legate, which disguised his real status as a hostage, in apparent good humour, but people who knew him well suspected that some secret design underlay his ostentatious complaisance.

The young Cardinal's train was made up of twenty carts, their contents hidden under canvases marked with the shield of the Borgias. The first day's march ended at Marino. Just outside that village two of the carts broke their wheels and had to be pushed to one side of the line of march. No one observed that those particular carts held everything of real value belonging to the Legate.

The next day's march was longer, and the royal party reached Velletri. There the King, Prince Djem, and Cesare Borgia were to occupy separate apartments prepared for them by the Bishop of the City. The Cardinal of Valencia attended the King to his quarters and then retired to his own. A French guard of honour accompanied him as representative of the Pontiff, though in reality its mission was to hold him in safe-keeping. Night fell.

As soon as it was dark Cesare left his lodgings by a back door and, disguised as a plain soldier and without attracting attention, walked in a leisurely manner through the streets till he came to a point on the Via Appia in the open country beyond the last houses of the city. There a man came forth from a clump of trees leading a magnificent warhorse by the bridle. It was a nobleman of Velletri whom Cesare Borgia had made his friend during a residence at Marino the year

before, in connection with a mission from his father. The Cardinal leaped into the saddle and galloped back at full speed toward Rome, entering the city before break of day. No one saw him, not even his father. Only long afterwards was it known that he went into hiding in the house of a humble Spanish priest, one Antonio Flores, a man who was at that time a clerk at the Rota, and who later became a Nuncio in France through favour of the Borgias.

Charles burst into a fury on learning of the Cardinal's flight, which he regarded as a personal insult; and his vexation was not much relieved when his men examined the eighteen carts covered with Borgia canvases, which had not stirred from Velletri—the drivers were not aware of their chief's design. The carts contained nothing but stones and sacks of earth! A troop of French cavalry dashed back to seize the two which had broken down on the roadside, but those vehicles proved as hard to find as the Cardinal himself!

Cesare's stratagem, which had evidently been planned from the beginning, won him great applause in Rome, where people were ever ready to appreciate a joke. The City was still raging at the abuses suffered from the invaders. The Borgias were now popular idols, and Cesare especially. This son of a Pope, born of a girl from across the Tiber, was showing himself a true Roman! Public imagination began attributing to him the most courageous exploits devised in a spirit of patriotic vengeance. It was reported that some drunken Swiss soldiers had forced their way into Vannozza's house and violated that still-desirable matron, but that her son had sought out the authors of the outrage and put them to death with his own hands. The story was false—Vannozza was at the time in Pesaro, living in a safe refuge with her daughter Lucretia; but the Roman mob was ready to credit anything heroic to "our Cæsar".

Alexander, for his part, was greatly alarmed at his son's rash step, which had been taken without consulting him. He despatched a delegation of Roman burghers full speed to Velletri to apologize for the affront offered the French King and beg him not to wreak vengeance on the city. As the event proved, Charles was not in a position to exact reprisals. He had to hurry onwards, in great chagrin at a jest which had

deprived his expedition of a Papal Legate he required if he were to give the impression that the Pope was supporting his cause. His embarrassment led the Cardinals hostile to the Borgias to believe that the whole intrigue had been planned between father and son, because it could not have been better timed to suit Alexander's policy. The King's cup of irritation was to overflow at Velletri the very next morning when some Spanish envoys appeared to deliver the protests of Ferdinand and Isabel against his march on Naples and his occupation of Papal fortresses. At last Alexander was beginning to receive moral support from his friend the Spanish King, though it was still a matter of words only.

However, the youthful conqueror marched forward, brushing the complaint contemptuously aside, to win a victory that could not have proved easier. The war was turning out to be a military parade. In view of the weakness of his troops and their scanty numbers, the King of Naples adopted the simple device of abandoning his States and withdrawing to Sicily. Though not the least resistance was anywhere visible, the invading army sacked and burned a number of towns just across the Neapolitan frontier. This was enough to hasten the surrender of other places. In a few weeks Charles had possession of the whole Kingdom, virtually without drawing his sword.

He entered Naples in heroic triumph on the 22nd of February. The moment was now at hand for him to fulfil his promises of a Crusade and advance on Constantinople by way of Greece—the latter country was eagerly awaiting him to rise against the Turks. But three days after the King's entrance Prince Djem died. The enemies of the Pope, doing violence to all plausibilities, attributed his death to the Borgias, alleging that he had been handed over to the King of France already poisoned, as though such a thing were possible. In point of fact the Sultan's brother had been ailing for some time as a result of excesses at table. Mantegna, the painter, had frequent occasion to visit him in his lodgings at the Vatican. He declares that Djem ordinarily ate five copious meals a day and was drunk at all hours. A fair horseman while in the saddle, he was a grotesque figure on foot as a consequence of his extreme fatness and the ugliness

of his features. Cesare and Giovanni Borgia found this curious Turk an amusing fellow and came to like him. More than once the two sons of the Pope appeared in the streets of Rome in turban and kaftan, and with their horses bridled in Turkish style, imitating the interesting fashions of the captive prince.

"Alexander the Sixth," Enciso continued, "could have had no possible motive for murdering Djem. As long as the Turkish pretender lived, the Pope would continue drawing the pension of forty thousand ducats from the Sultan. On the other hand, if Djem remained in the hands of Charles the Eighth, the latter stood pledged to utilize the captive's influence by an immediate march on Constantinople. The King, however, had never thought seriously of such a Crusade, and he, accordingly, would have been the only one to gain by the death of the Turkish prince. If poisoning there were, the suspicions would better rest on Charles. As a matter of fact, Djem ate and drank himself to death, his debauches increasing after he left the Vatican, since he was then with an army where everyone was drunk, or else sunk in more bestial licence."

The French King's residence in Naples was, in fact, a fitting climax to the "War of Fornication". The city was given over to one great orgy. Neither the King nor his captains gave a thought to their promise of making war on the Infidel. The ranks of the army thinned out with alarming speed under the ravages of drunkenness and disease. The conquerors abused the Neapolitans as they had abused the inhabitants of other cities, robbing them individually and exacting heavy contributions.

The celebrated Commines, who was serving as French Ambassador in Venice, took alarm at the turn in Italian public opinion and wrote his King advising an immediate retreat. In fact, Ferdinand the Catholic, working from Spain, was busily weaving a great intrigue against Charles the Eighth, combining the Pope, the Emperor of Austria, Venice, and even Ludovico the Moor, who had opened the gates of Italy to the French army but was now changing his mind in view of French excesses. The new League was proclaimed on the 12th of April, and Charles had to dash at once for the French

frontier to avoid being cut off by the Allies in the Kingdom of Naples. Escape by sea was impossible. Fleets of Spain and Venice held the Mediterranean as well as the Adriatic. He had to go out by the same door through which he had entered, and to reach the Alps he would again be obliged to cross the Papal States.

Charles left part of his army in Naples under command of the Duke of Montpensier and with the remainder set out for Rome, informing the Pope of his visit in most flattering terms. But Alexander was a sly old fox not to be caught in such a trap as this pleasure-loving youngster could lay. He suspected that the King's real intention was again to lay hands on Cesare Borgia and use the boy as a shield as he made his way back to France across hostile Italy. The French monarch could be relied on to seek revenge upon a still younger man who had made him look ridiculous through the stratagem of Velletri!

To induce the Pope to grant him an audience in Rome, the King offered an immediate payment of a hundred thousand ducats, and for the investiture of Naples he suggested an annual tribute of fifty thousand ducats. Since soldiers in his pay were still occupying the Kingdom, he considered the permanence of his conquest as beyond dispute, never dreaming that Ferdinand the Catholic would send an army from Spain to drive him out. But neither the King's bribes nor the threats of the French envoys moved the Pope. He decided rather to imitate Cesare's tactics, and fled with twenty Cardinals from Rome to take refuge in Orvieto.

Charles barely halted in the capital, but hurried toward Orvieto in quest of the audience. Alexander, however, was determined to avoid an interview at all costs. He moved on to Perugia, to give the troops of the League time to mobilize at Parma. Informed of what was going on, Charles gave up hope of the audience and dashed in precipitous flight along the road to the Alps; whereupon Alexander returned tranquilly to Rome with Cesare riding at his side. The young man had long since left his hiding-place in the house of Antonio Flores, and was at his father's elbow during all these skilful marches and counter-marches.

Charles was in fact cut off, and had to fight a furious battle

at Fornovo to break the armed circle his enemies had drawn about him. In the presence of real danger at last, the young King deported himself like a valiant knight and fought the one fight worthy of mention in the whole war. He finally managed to save his person, though the baggage of his army, as well as the booty he had won at Naples, remained in the enemy's hands. Even the King's personal belongings were abandoned on the field of battle—in particular a collection of portraits which he was taking home as souvenirs of the beauties he had possessed in Italy.

“This war of a single battle,” Enciso concluded, with a sinister expression, “by reason of the terrible licentiousness which featured its every detail, first brought to prominent notice a great affliction which still torments the human race. A living spectre of syphilis seemed suddenly to raise its head in Italy and to terrify everyone with the hideous spectacle of its ugliness. The disease must have existed in Europe at an earlier period, though probably with somewhat different manifestations. For some reason that has never been understood, it seems to have gained sudden virulence at this time, and to have spread with explosive rapidity among all social classes, destroying kings and Popes, and desolating whole regions. It may well have been that the measures used by medicine at the time in combating the disease contributed rather to its violence and contagiousness.”

“Strangely enough,” answered Borja, “the disease seems to have broken out among the Spanish Discoverers in America at almost the same time, and a parallel legend came to attribute its origin to the poor natives of the New World.”

“Yes,” answered Enciso, “and I suppose there is no way of arriving at the truth. The fact that Europeans associated syphilis with the march of Charles the Eighth enabled writers to foist its origin upon one people or another according as they happened to live on one side or the other of the Alps. The Italians came to call it the ‘French disease’, or in more learned style the ‘Gallic disease’. The French knew it as the ‘Neapolitan disease’.”

CHAPTER VI

A FAUX PAS

THIS placid, smooth-running life in an atmosphere of historical memory was to be disturbed for Claudio Borja, some days later, by two separate considerations. After one of those "confidential luncheons" to which the Ambassador from Spain frequently invited him, that gentleman beckoned him aside into his private office, and began to "talk down" to him, in tone of affection, just as he had done in the old days as his guardian. A few allusions to his friendship with Claudio's father! . . . And besides, Borja had always been regarded as a member of the family! . . . Oh, to be sure, he, Claudio, was a few years older than Stella, but they had, you might say, been brought up together. . . . Not to mention the "elective affinity"—so he called it—which they had always had for each other. . . .

"Why," said Bustamante, "back there in Madrid everybody took it for granted that you two were going to marry, and then . . . afterwards . . . things changed! Well, let's not talk of that! I am a man myself, and have had my weaknesses—things I would just as soon forget! But I have been watching you two recently, and I am sure I am not mistaken . . . you two . . . well you have patched it up, that's all. . . . Oh, don't deny it! It's something anyone can see! Stella seems happier than she has been for a long time; and my sister-in-law tells me that when the three of you are out together Stella and you try to walk ahead of her, by yourselves . . . a thing not altogether considerate of poor Nati, though it does give her a real joy, I can tell you!"

The pompous Ambassador thought the situation was getting hard to explain! That was why he had decided to

take a hand in such an affair of the heart! When, in two words, when were Claudio and Stella going to be married?

Bustamante went on in the same tone of affectionate counsel. To look at the matter from Claudio's point of view, it was time for him to settle down, stop drifting aimlessly along into middle age as a confirmed bachelor! Amusement was all right so far as it went, but a fellow owed something to the society in which he lived, and payment of such a debt brought both profit and honour! Claudio would work better with a young and charming wife to look after him, and—Bustamante ventured the hint in appropriately modest terms—not everyone had the chance to be the son-in-law of a Senator and an Ambassador! That connection would assure Borgia any post he wished in public life in Spain . . . or, if he preferred to live abroad, in Rome, for example, the best society would be open to him, thanks to the intimacies which Don Aristides had contracted among the people he encountered. To be sure, Borja was already accepted in that world through his personal merits as an attractive young man of estimable qualities, but he should not forget that not the least of those merits was his connection with the family of the Ambassador from Spain!

Claudio did not know what to do or say under this pressure from his sometime guardian. As a matter of fact, he had never discussed marriage with Stella. They had thought of each other all along as playmates, comrades, childhood friends. They talked of things usually as though their futures had something in common, but they had never gone so far as to define the precise character of that common destiny. They would laugh and joke, walk hand in hand, frolic about with the intimacy of children who had lived all their lives in the same family—but of love they had never talked!

What a gulf, indeed, between his playful chats with Stella and certain passionate hours he had passed in a beautiful garden on the Riviera! Not once had he kissed the girl, nor felt tempted to do so. He doubted whether he had ever really thought of her as a woman. He had found something sweet, something restful and soothing, in her companionship. That might have been love, but if it were, it was a love different from any he had otherwise known! As for Doña Nati,

PART II
THE RED BULL

CHAPTER I

CICERO'S DAUGHTER

So far as Claudio Borja could see, Enciso de las Casas had not changed much in the years that had passed since he first appeared as a lecturer at the Athenæum at Madrid, the left half of his frock-coat blazing with a museum of decorations from the Pope and all the Empires then existing in Europe. The illustrious South American showed a trace of grey in his reddish beard, and his scalp was, if anything, more white and more polished than ever. There was still the line of red around the edges of his cyclids which seemed to oblige him to close and open them rapidly, as he spoke, with a sort of nervous tick.

But on settling in Rome after eight months of wandering Borja began to find the man's intimacy quite worth while. Appreciating him at his true worth, to begin with, Borja did not need to echo the gibes and jests of the many who partook of the ostentatious hospitality of Enciso de las Casas, only to ridicule him afterwards for his feverish literary activities. Borja did not read the sumptuously bound and printed volumes which the diplomat gave him, with grandiloquent dedications to the "most eminent of Spanish poets". He did not even cut their pages. He was not interested in re-traversing superficial descriptions of the Italian Renaissance such as had become familiar to him in his days at school. Yet he could honestly say that this volunteer diplomat so avid of worldly distinction was an amiable, tolerant, thoroughly excellent person, with a love of learning and a respect for the achievements of others that placed him far above the majority of the parasites and so-called "friends" who gathered about him—backward, lazy people of vulgar tastes, timid in the

presence of new ideas, ever thinking in old and well-worn ruts.

Borja thought Enciso drew a fine portrait of himself in a remark he once made, that he would have been willing to give up everything he owned in America and Europe—his coffee plantations, his sugar refinery, the palace he had bought in Rome, perhaps even his wife and children—could he have been, in exchange, a Prince of the Church of the fifteenth or sixteenth centuries—the period when he would have preferred to have lived.

The palace in question was a subject of pitying mirth for many envious individuals who frequented Enciso's banquets. A shrewd business man at home in South America, Enciso himself soon divined that he had been mercilessly plucked by a number of aristocrats—among them a Roman princess—whom he had trusted as his advisors in the purchase of the building. But that did not diminish the pride he felt in owning such a monument. He esteemed it a great historic treasure inasmuch as it had been built by a nephew—some said quite bluntly, by a son—of a Pope of the eighteenth century. As for the interior, the honorary diplomat had a certain talent for decoration. He had imported a number of antique altars from churches in Spain.

The walls were overladen with tapestries, columns, sheathings with tarnished gold-leaf carvings, paintings of cadaverous saints or fat polychrome angels, *précieux* landscapes or mythological nudes from the *grand siècle*, Byzantine Virgins on backgrounds of gold, or agonized Christs, alternating with naked Venuses. Stands of vari-coloured marble were strewn with little boxes inlaid with mother-of-pearl. There were wooden partitions of modern make, but peppered with charges of bird-shot or salt fired from pistols, to imitate worm-holes. The chairs were all of monastic design, upholstered in red leather with great brass nails. Enciso de las Casas meant it when he said he felt like a Cardinal of the Renaissance come to life again beyond the Atlantic.

The diplomat was inclined to boast of his Spanish-American origins, which he regarded as the loftiest and most interesting of nobilities. Only the ancient lineages of some of the Roman houses were comparable to his. His optimistic patriotism as

a Spanish colonial flattered Claudio and at the same time amused him. According to Enciso, all the Spaniards who moved to America in the early centuries were, without exception, younger sons of great families, gentlemen of high birth and heroic traditions—the pick of the Spanish race, as he put it. Modesty alone prevented him from adding that of all the select aristocrats who had emigrated across the ocean those who bore his family name were the best and noblest.

His faith in the noble ancestry of the colonists in the New World—as though not a gaol-bird, nor even a commoner, was to be found amongst them—inclined him to a sentimental regard for all Spaniards who approached him. The greater his esteem for Spain, the more exaggerated the hyperboles which he bestowed on Spanish history, the greater the lustre he thought he was shedding on his own ancestry and on the name, doubly famous through birth and learning, which he would transmit to his daughters.

Claudio had a twin virtue in Enciso's eyes: as a Spaniard, and as a Borgia. One of the man's fads was to look up the genealogy of all his friends. For that purpose he had filled his library with books and documents, and sought numberless transcriptions of others from the "Kings of Arms", so-called, in Madrid, the ultimate authorities, as he believed, in everything touching the "science" of heraldry.

"Why," he would say to Claudio, "you come from a great historic family, an ancestry which I would be glad to have myself, were I not satisfied with my own descent from those Spanish noblemen who crossed the seas as Conquistadores. You derive from the Papal aristocracy. A great family, the Borgias! I have often been tempted to write a book about them myself. Your uncle, Don Baltasar, when he was here recently, also thought I was the man to do it—but, after all, a fellow has only one life! Your people began to be important in the world with Pope Calixtus the Third, and they finished a century later by giving a great saint to the Church—Francis, fourth Duke of Gandia, a cultivated gentleman who became a Jesuit and was at last beatified as St. Francis de Borja. Not a man among them but showed courage, energy, or, as we say, personality. But just imagine a man like Cæsar Borgia, and another like the St. Francis in question, coming from the same

line within a few decades of each other! Some of the Borgias were heroes, others saints, others terrible sinners—but every one of them was interesting and remarkable in some way or other."

Enciso summed it all up by remarking one day, with the condescension of a master addressing a pupil :

"My dear Claudio, you are a young man just beginning your career. You have your whole time free. You ought to write a book about those ancestors of yours who are so grievously slandered and so badly understood."

But Claudio took the suggestion calmly enough. Work? Write? For eight months now he had been living in idleness, going about from place to place with the uneasy hopefulness of the invalid who moves from resort to resort in search of a cure he never finds. He was alone, entirely free, absolute master of his person! But of what use the freedom he had conquered?

On leaving the Côte d'Azur he had gone to Madrid. It was a virtual flight with no other farewell than a terse note. The night before he had talked with her calmly. They had continued seeing each other for a time, though never able quite to forget the half-quarrel of that afternoon on the upper terrace in the garden, looking out over the sea under the glow of sunset. Both felt the separation inevitable, yet they kept postponing it from day to day. At last Claudio stepped aboard a train, leaving a letter on his table with a request that it be delivered at Señora de Pineda's villa. His flight was the unwitting counterpart of her departure from Marseilles the year before.

On reaching Madrid he had considered himself free for ever from what he called "slavery in golden chains". He felt, in that familiar environment, as though he had quite erased the interval of his absence. It was as though he had never gone to Avignon. In the end he might forget even those last months of his life. Here was his old room in his old hotel; here were his old friends, here the resorts he had frequented of yore with his boyhood companions; the same arguments, the same quarrels, the same jealousies, between young men who were compelled to see each other every day, as though life were impossible without such contacts and combats. Again he found himself besieged by the same Bohemians, who begged

and borrowed as they had before, treating him with the deference or the contempt which they severally bestowed upon wealthy dabblers in literature.

He had chosen Madrid because he thought that environment would supply an effective antidote to the despair within him. Yet memories of Rosaura came forward to greet him at almost every step. Here, for example, in the Salamanca quarter was the residence where Bustamante had lived in those days. It was now occupied by strangers; for Doña Nati had thought it wiser to surrender the lease on the theory that her brother-in-law would hold his post in Rome for ever. In that building he had met Rosaura for the first time! All the details of the dinner in her honour were painfully fresh in his mind—the dazzling charm she exercised over the men, the envious admiration of the women.

So that street was barred to him if he were to avoid a rush of disconcerting recollections of the past! Images he had never before remarked during his months with her came up in his mind among these familiar scenes. Here was a spot on the Pasco de la Castellana, where he had seen her riding in a car one day. And here was a shop on the Carrera de San Jerónimo. He had observed a crowd of men in front of it one day. They were gazing in and jesting salaciously upon a most attractive woman who had left her car at the curb and entered. It was the beautiful South American widow, who could never appear in public without exciting a half-riot of curiosity and male desire.

"I shall get over this!" Borja kept saying to himself. "I have not been away so very long as yet. When I get at my work all this will vanish from my mind like so much smoke."

And he did set to work organizing his studies, as he would have set about a cure. He rented a house on the outskirts of Madrid, gathering into it all the books and furniture which at one time or another he had distributed among his friends for safe keeping. Flaming with sudden enthusiasm, he thought of a number of volumes he could write, any one of which might easily be famous—an epic poem on Pope Luna, recounting the latter's adventures on land and sea; a novel or two, in prose, assembling his impressions of contemporary life—one might even deal with his own sentimental affairs, that turmoil of

voluptuousness and discontent which he had felt as a modern Tannhäuser sleeping at the feet of Venus. In this connection his break with Rosaura might prove an almost providential blessing!

He began working on the Tannhäuser theme, but almost immediately he had to desist. It was like tearing open a wound of his own and plunging his fingers into it to aggravate the pain. A poet may sing his sorrows. Such work is rapid, the labour of an hour, the mere fixing of an impression that seethes in the mind for a second and then passes on. But a novelist must deal with other people. A novel is a labour of months. One cannot linger so long upon one's own troubles. To do so would be a torment greater than a man's power to endure. No, his own story would be out of the question! And suddenly his ardour for creation deserted him.

But excuses were not lacking to his faltering will. Summer was coming on. Already people in Madrid were scattering to the resorts in the north. In such an atmosphere it would be better to postpone working until the following winter! For the moment he should do as others were doing!

But instead of heading toward the Bay of Biscay in their wake, he turned to the Mediterranean; a letter from Don Baltasar had urged him to come to Valencia. The Canon was already back in his literary-archive-mansion, all agog with the things he had seen in Rome, thanks to the friendship of the Spanish Ambassador, and of a famous South American diplomat, Señor Enciso de las Casas, whom he regarded as one of the most important figures, next after the Pope, in the Eternal City. What a palace indeed! A regular museum! And what a man besides, on speaking terms with all the Princes of the Church—they even came to his banquets! And what a scholar! Don Baltasar had brought home some of Enciso's books in magnificent printings designed especially for book-lovers.

The Canon received his nephew with no great excitement. Nothing in this world had any importance, really, as compared with the monographs he had in preparation and the discoveries he had just made in Rome. It did not occur to him to inquire what Claudio was thinking of doing now that he had come back to Spain, nor did he ask about Señora de Pineda and whether

she had had anything to do with Claudio's change of residence. The Côte d'Azur seemed to have faded from his mind as though he had never lunched on two occasions in the villa of that lady.

Almost his first words related to something he had seen in the Vatican, the so-called "Rooms of the Borgias", and in them his special interest had been in the floors! There could be no doubt of it, Don Baltasar contended, only a few tiles of the ancient pavement survived—inserted into the modern floors as curious relics! The originals all came from Manises and bore the escutcheon of the Borja family—the red bull. He had made impressions of such as he found, and intended to use them in his forthcoming study on the history of Valencian tiles. And in a flash the worthy Canon was off on another lecture, enumerating the glories of that art which the Arabs had founded and the Christians perfected, in Valencia, till the industry became one of the most prolific in the artistic commerce of medieval Spain.

"It was the sailors of Mallorca," he said, "who carried Valencian tiles, along with the gold-glinted plates and vases of the region, to all parts of the world. That is why they are called still 'majolica'!"

However, the tile-makers working in the villages of Manises and Paterna became real masters. In the documents of the time they are always referred to in Latin with a title of honour: *magistri operis terra*. Or perhaps, in cases where they made tiles or bricks only, they were called *rajolarii*, since "tile" in Valencian is "*rajol*". The fame of Valencian tiles reached Rome at last, and Popes and Cardinals imported so-called "majolicas" to decorate their new buildings, finding that they added a touch of gaiety and colour to the white marbles dug from the ruins of Antiquity.

"The first Pope Borgia," said the Canon, "was too busy fighting the Turks to do much building; besides, he was a jurist. Alexander the Sixth was more of an artist, and in making additions to the Vatican he chose to adorn the Papal halls with tiles from Manises. He ordered whole floors from the *rajolarii* who lived hereabout, following designs which I believe were made by Pinturicchio. That is what I am trying to make sure of now!"

Claudio was scantily interested in the Canon's chatter. He even thought his uncle rather bad-mannered. A good-enough person, perhaps, for an old priest! But too much absorbed in himself, too much taken up with his *magistri operis terra*! Not once did he mention Rosaura's name. On his return journey along the Riviera his train must have skirted the very garden where she had entertained him at luncheon, yet he had probably not even thought of raising his eyes! There was one thing, however, that Claudio was concerned to know. How had Figueras ever discovered that he was living in Madrid and sent him a letter there?

"Oh," replied Don Baltasar indifferently, attaching no importance to the point, "Señor Bustamante told me, just before I left Rome."

Claudio started with surprise. So Don Aristides and the other Bustamantes knew about his separation from Rosaura shortly after it occurred! But then, he reflected, there was a continuous interchange between the diplomatic colony in Rome and the various groups that wintered in the neighbourhood of Nice! Gossip was being continually carried back and forth. That automatic espionage had probably reported the disappearance of the young man, Rosaura de Pineda's "latest"!

Claudio stayed only a few days in Valencia. Then he went back to Madrid, unwilling, because unable, to risk the ride direct to Barcelona. Peñiscola lay on that route! Besides, if he left Spain by way of Port-Bou he would pass through Avignon; and that would be giving a deliberate kick at the wasp-nest of his memories, which would rise storming in pursuit of him like so many angry insects!

From Madrid he went on to San Sebastian, stayed a week, grew bored, and then continued to Biarritz. The torment still dogged his steps. During the first days of his flight he had thought it the part of manners to send Rosaura postcards with conventional greetings, that she might know where he was. He received no replies, and he found her silence quite natural. Gradually he lengthened the intervals between such souvenirs, and finally dropped them altogether. On various occasions during the summer he felt constrained to write to her again—but long letters, with anguished recollections of the past and fervent prayers for forgiveness. But pride in

each case restrained him. He did not post any of the letters. He would write them at night and leave them on his table with the idea of posting them the following morning; but his first step on awaking in the morning would be to tear them up.

"It is better this way!" he would say to himself. "Let us not undo what we have done! I must cling to my freedom!"

And he would wonder whether she might be doing, likewise, addressing to him passionate cries that would call him to her side, but then destroying them on mature reflection under the angry promptings of pride.

Though he assured himself many times that he was growing indifferent to Rosaura, and noted how gradually her image was losing its sharpness in his mind, he could not suppress his curiosity to know where she might be. Going on to Paris in early autumn and meeting acquaintances from the Côte d'Azur, he would always make such inquiries, though they would meet invariably a first exclamation of surprise, and a second one of ignorance.

"Madame de Pineda? We have not been seeing her for some time, nor have I met any of her acquaintances! Where is she, I wonder?"

The positive answers he received were in conflict with each other. Some reported her at Deauville during the winter, others at the Lido. One person even said she had gone to Biarritz—but at the very time when Claudio had been there! In reality she had not been much in evidence anywhere since the winter she had just passed on the Côte d'Azur. Claudio concluded finally that she must have gone to London to be with her children again. He remembered that disturbing experiences in love always aroused bursts of maternal affection in her.

Claudio drifted to Rome early in the winter without knowing just why. After a year of virtual silence Señor Bustamante had written him in Paris, in a slightly reproachful tone. And yet the Ambassador's letter had really had little to do with his journey to the Italian capital. As he analysed his own motives he finally decided that he had gone to Rome for the single reason that in his prevailing state of mind that city was the only one that could really attract him. For a long time he had been thinking again of his poem on Pope Luna, who

had lived his life dreaming of conquering the Eternal City without even once entering her gates.

"I think I'll make the trip for him!" Claudio said to himself one day. "Perhaps a journey to that goal of his fondest ambitions will give me a new perspective on his fascinating character."

Furthermore, the manuscripts and articles which Don Baltasar had given him in Nice had aroused his interest in the Borgias and the Italian Renaissance. And he had finally given way to this triple pressure, remarking to himself that, after all, he could write just as well in one place as in another.

The now illustrious Ambassador welcomed Claudio in his palace on the Piazza di Spagna like one of the family. It was as though the Bustamantes had been living all their lives in that sumptuous edifice which had been assigned from time immemorial to Spanish legates to the Holy See. Doña Nati moved about in it as she would have in her own home. No one made allusion to Claudio's recent past. Rosaura's name never arose in the conversation. One could not have guessed that the Bustamantes had ever seen or known her. The "widow Gamboa" seemed about to succumb on more than one occasion to the temptations of a spiteful frankness all but dominant in her nature; for dislike of "that Pineda woman" meant a great deal in Doña Nati's life. But it was as though there were a tacit understanding that the past should be overlooked, and the combative sister-in-law of the Ambassador managed to hold her tongue even when Don Aristides was not at hand to call her to order with significant winks and frowns. Stella, for her part, was all happiness at seeing Claudio again, and not to spoil her joy she refrained from asking him what he had been doing over their long separation. Whenever the Ambassador was at home he set the instructive example by conducting his conversations with Borja on significantly perilous ground. As usual, his favourite themes were prominent Spanish-Americans then present in Europe or even in Rome, with all of whom, of course, he was on intimate terms. But, at the same time, with diplomatic deftness he would dwell upon names intimately connected with Señora de Pineda, without once mentioning her name.

His own glory and importance were naturally much on

the Senator's mind. He frequently evinced the sadness proper to a great man who is badly misunderstood and worse rewarded, in complaining that his government seemed scarcely to notice the great services he was rendering in Rome. Not a minister from the republics across the sea but was a friend of his and had stopped at Madrid to receive the homage of the "Spanish-American Union". Thus he had made himself the effective leader of all the Spanish-speaking countries in the Italian capital, something which no Ambassador before him had succeeded in accomplishing.

"Why, my dear fellow," he would remark to Borja gravely, "I am the umbilical cord that unites the Church with all her offspring of Spanish race. All the members of the South American diplomatic corps avail themselves of my influence in transacting any business of importance. You must have observed that this palace is a virtual centre for diplomats of Spanish speech."

But then, as though he thought one concession were due to facts only too patent, he would add with a touch of envious ingratitudo :

"To be sure, there is Enciso de las Casas! He has as many people as I do, or perhaps even more, because he invites all the Cardinals. But Enciso is rich, and by spending huge sums of money on daily entertainments he manages to pose as a great diplomat just as he poses as a writer."

Don Aristides, for his part, confined himself to afternoon teas which he gave under the economical supervision of his sister-in-law.

"We didn't come here to get ourselves into the poor-house," the widow Gamboa would affirm acidly. "With the salary a government pays an Ambassador one tea a month is more than it deserves. Let those people who want to get their board free go and live on Enciso, who is willing to pay the price for the sake of being tickled under the chin."

Though, such animosities did not prevent poor Gamboa's sometime tormentor from fawning on Enciso's wife and daughters with exaggerated flatteries, and from returning their calls with rigorous punctuality! Doña Nati did not wish to be forgotten in connection with any banquet held at Enciso's house!

In a short time Claudio found himself situated just as he had been two years before in Madrid. Everyone regarded him as the prospective son-in-law of the Spanish Ambassador. There was not even any allusion to the subject. His engagement to the Senator's daughter was taken as a matter of course. Stella's aunt was again treating him as a member of the family, showering upon him tender attentions she had for no one else. She always invited him on her drives with Stella about Rome, or on visits to the family's friends ; and always managed on such occasions to slip away at the proper moment that the two "lovers" might be left alone. And Claudio allowed himself to be manœuvred by these devices—they were perfectly apparent to him—in view of a subdued, tenuous, but none the less perceptible pleasure he found in this contact with the young girl. Whenever he came into her presence his first thought would be of the gorgeous fulsome beauty of Señora de Pineda. But then he would forget Rosaura under the suasion of Stella's more naïve and less noisy charm. It was like the subtle perfume of the mignonette as compared with the suffocating fragrance of the rose. Besides, he had been keeping to himself for many months past, and this timid bashful creature, however different from the other, was nevertheless a woman.

Suddenly, through one of those illogical caprices of his character, he grew bored with Bustamante and the latter's fussy sister-in-law, as well as with the whole tribe—that was his word—of Roman Cardinals, Italian princes and helter-skelter diplomats who gathered about the board of Enciso de las Casas as at a free restaurant. Stella was the only one who did not fall under his disapprobation at such times ; indeed, the thought of her would sweeten his spirit to a certain extent. Yet he felt no particular urge to see her either, and he would remain for days shut up in his own house.

He was living in a little villa on the outskirts of Rome, a "plant" arranged in artistic style, with a little garden and a painter's studio, by a young American whose inclination toward all the arts was much like Claudio's in respect of literature. Claudio had met the young landlord in Paris at the house of a common friend ; and since the man was returning to New York for a number of months, he had been

willing to rent the villa along with its furnishings and its service—the latter an Italian caretaker, with a wife who also acted as cook.

The most important article of furniture in the studio was a luxurious divan covered with a canopy of striped silk supported at the corners on lances. The walls were hung with paintings which Claudio described as "ultra-modern". But in that house, at any rate, he could idle for hours, stretched full length on comfortable cushions, and follow his thoughts as they wandered aimlessly through the past. He was conscious of the spiritual influence of Rome, the pressure, as it were, of an environment that inspires the most commonplace souls with love of Antiquity and fills them with unexpected romance.

But, of the twenty-five centuries visible in the life of the Eternal City, his mind dwelt with greatest predilection on that period of a hundred years marked by the historians with the name of "Renaissance". He was beginning to feel as Enciso did—that he too would like to have been a Cardinal of the fifteenth century. He envied the princes and *condottieri* of the time of Sigismondo Malatesta and Cæsar Borgia, who fought battles between dance and dance, organized fêtes of carnival before the towns they were besieging, and crammed their lives with all the sensuous pleasures and all the idle arts mankind has ever invented, that they might taste them all at once, much as the drunkard empties a bottle at one draught. Actors on a very small stage, these men nevertheless seemed to Borja the great men of action known to human history. They all died young, as though at thirty life had no novelty unknown to them and they were willing to depart. That was an age of men thirsting for glory, Popes and secular sovereigns alike. They fixed their minds only on immortality, and, having won it, were able to look death calmly in the face!

The luxury of life in Rome became something unheard of before. The Florentines had called the Romans "cowherds", because the principal source of Roman wealth was the wild flocks that roamed the marshy Campagna. But they had to admit that these uncouth "cowherds" were beginning to rival them in refinement and display. Venice, Florence,

Naples, had resources of their own; but Rome attracted money from all Christendom. Gambling was proving as destructive to Roman family life as other forms of licence.

The Popes concerned themselves with their carnival programmes as meticulously as with affairs of State. They entertained the public with wildly scandalous diversions, that people might feel completely free and lose thoughts of rebellion in the din of a noisy immorality. Writers were exaggerating the models Boccaccio had left in his "Tales", amusing the public with stories which brought marriage and the family into ridicule. Theatrical performances were becoming a fad in the palaces of the Italian princes, and all the plays produced were based on lascivious anecdotes. Respectable magnates kept oriental concubines in their houses, and even paid public visits to the residences of famous courtesans. Painting and sculpture knew no limits of modesty. Artists were permitted the greatest licence in decorating the churches, even putting the faces of contemporaries on holy images. Sigismondo Malatesta dedicated a church in Rimini to the glory of his mistress, the beautiful Isotta, a woman notable for her inability to read and write in an age when women practised literature and the arts; and in the same church he erected statues of the Olympian gods and painted a naked Venus at the side of the Virgin. Such general sacrilege helps to explain the exaggerated zeal and the disordered fanaticism of Savonarola in embracing sensuality and art under the same anathema.

Vainly did princes and Popes make laws against excessive expenditures. A costume of one of the women of the Sforzas rose, by virtue of the pearls and precious stones with which it was embroidered, to the value of fifty thousand modern pounds. Weddings were attended with such costly ceremonies that one of them all but ruined a family. Parents therefore would marry but one of their daughters at the most, and send the others to convents. Usury was the leading industry of many Italian cities. In years gone by the Jews had been the only ones to live by lending money, but now they were being supplanted by Christians, who proved themselves more pitiless than the Jewish moneylenders of old. Interests of thirty per cent. were common, and sometimes they reached seventy or eighty. Everyone needed

money to maintain the pace of life, and was willing to borrow it regardless of the consequences.

It was as though, in the mad rush for pleasure, people had sworn to die young. At no period in history had there been greater contempt for human life. Anyone who had an enemy thought himself free to murder him, either with his own hand or through hired assassins. Wealthy families employed chemists—"alchemists" they were called—to prepare poisons and invent new ones. The sins of wives and daughters gave occasion for terrible acts of vengeance. Rarely did a day break on Rome without revealing a number of dead bodies on the streets. But this dangerous life put no check on the perilous adventures of darkness. As the Humanists preached, the favourites of the gods died young. Only a vulgar burgher of ignoble soul could aspire to the horrors of old age!

Despite this evident materialism, Humanism represented, underneath, a great spiritual aspiration.

"The scholars and artists of the period," said Borja to himself, "lived prostrate at the feet of Venus—a goddess who had come to life after ages of mortal slumber like one of the statues ploughshares kept turning up in the Campagna of Rome."

Venus was not only the Goddess of Love; she was the symbol of beauty, rationality, joyous living—all things which the Renaissance worshipped. Even people of low estate felt stirrings of the same ideal enthusiasm. One day some labourers in digging a ditch unearthed a sarcophagus of Ancient Rome, and in it they found the body of a young girl, naked, white as marble, with golden hair that reminded them of sunlight. For fifteen hundred years it had lain preserved by the mysterious liquid that had been poured into the coffin. Crowds came running to look upon it, and they gave the girl a name. She was Cicero's daughter! Who else could she be? Cicero, the orator, ruled the Renaissance as Virgil, the magician, had ruled the Middle Ages! Magnates of Rome drew off the protecting fluid which had saved "Cicero's daughter" for so many years, and distributed it among themselves for purposes of magic. Deprived now of its liquid shroud, the beautiful body disintegrated in a day under the action of light and air. But, for once, Venus of the White Skin had returned in person to earth!

Christianity itself was saturated with paganism. Under the influence of the Humanists high officials of the Church fomented the mingling of the two religions, eager to show themselves men of their time endowed with a taste for good letters. Heaven became "Olympus"; God was rebaptized as "Jupiter Optimus Maximus"; the saints were "gods"; the angels, "geniuses"; Christ, the "Sublime Hero"; Mary, a resplendent "nymph". Nuns were now called "vestals"; the Cardinals, "senators". Hell was "Tartarus", and Saint Thomas Aquinas, the "Apollo of Christianity". The pulpits and even the high Consistories of the Church came to know this strange mixture of Catholic and pagan terms. In the very Basilica of Saint Peter preachers talked of "Mary, Mother of the Gods"; of "Christ the High-Thunderer"; and the Popes were referred to by their flatterers in Italian and in Latin as "Cesar" or "Augustus", "Aristotle" or "Plato", "Cicero" or "Virgil".

This love of Antiquity did not suppress superstitions, however. Astrology was the most prominent of all the sciences. Even the Popes believed the stars had influence on the destinies of men, and regularly consulted magicians versed in the sciences of the future. Only Pius the Second, a writer, and Alexander the Sixth, the second Borgia, kept more or less free from such charlatanry. Alexander went so far as to ignore works of astrology dedicated to him. His son, Cesar Borgia, on the other hand, though almost constantly a sceptic, was as superstitious as most men of combat who lead dangerous lives, and, like many other captains of his time, consulted fortune-tellers before engaging in a battle or laying siege to a town.

Celebrated pontiffs such as Sixtus the Fourth, Julius the Second, Leo the Tenth, and still later, Paul the Third, either applied themselves directly to the study of astrology or listened with the greatest seriousness to the prognostications of celestial experts. Paolo Toscanelli, physician and scholar though he was, held a post as astrologer to the Medici, and did not lose faith in that science till the last years of his life, when he saw himself a ruined man in spite of the great wealth predicted for him by the stars. All important decisions of State, and even matters of private life, such as a short journey

or the selection of a medicine, were determined after consulting the heavenly bodies. Among the rich, no one would venture to sit down at table, don a new garment, or launch a new enterprise, unless conjunctions in the heavens were favourable.

Claudio's lonely meditations would always eventuate on the history of the Borgias and the falsehoods which hostile contemporaries of the family had circulated to their discredit. It was absurd, he thought, to judge them with the criteria of modern times. To overlook the age and the environment in which they lived was to sin against fairness.

"If the savages who are still to be found about the world are repugnant to us," he judged, "it is because their primitive customs are so much at variance with the relative civilization we have attained. In the same way there are abuses, injustices, absurdities, in the life of our time which future generations will regard as execrable or disgusting, though to us they seem a necessary consequence of the special spirit of our times. We shall not understand the Borgias unless we know the men and the conditions of their era. Pious souls of to-day look with horror on Alexander the Sixth, who was a Pope with children. That is because the Papacy of the present moment is a truly spiritual power, free from the temptations and moral imperfections inherent in all worldly powers; and it is closely watched, besides, by critics ever eager to catch it in error—the anti-clericalism of free-thinkers, and the numerous Protestant sects which broke away from Catholic Christianity.

"During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the situation was quite otherwise. The Church exerted moral rule over the great powers of Europe; but at the same time it was just a State among States, since it exercised political government over the city of Rome and the territories of the Holy See. The Pope was a secular sovereign among other secular sovereigns. He was an elective king, as other kings were. Rodrigo de Borja was not the only Pope who had children and tried to do the best he could for them. The College of Cardinals from which the Popes had to be chosen was made up of rich barons, accustomed to living in more ostentatious luxury than secular princes because their incomes were larger. They patronized

the arts like other barons, and in moments of peace they spent their time in hunting in order to keep their muscles in training for the prowess they would need in war. When they were young they had their concubines, who provided them with numerous heirs ; and these, if they were modest of speech, they called 'nephews'. But then again, when their children distinguished themselves in some conspicuous way, not necessarily good, parental pride would get the better of them and they would frankly own them as children."

CHAPTER II

BORGIA BIDES HIS TIME

CLAUDIO thought the life of Rodrigo de Borja as Cardinal quite as interesting as his pontificate, later. There was a period of thirty-four years between the death of his uncle, Calixtus the Third, and his own ascension to the throne as Alexander the Sixth. During that time he served under three other Popes, Pius the Second, Sixtus the Fourth, and Innocent the Eighth, all of them retaining him in his high post as Vice-Chancellor of the Church, and each adding to the benefices he already held new parishes and bishoprics, which made the Cardinal of Valencia one of the richest of the ecclesiastical potentates. A man of tireless energy, complex and contradictory in his conduct as were most of the famous men of the Renaissance, he devoted half of his time to pleasures and the other half to business of State or to prayers, for licentiousness and worldly enjoyments were combined in him with the faith of a sincere believer. Such inconsistencies were not exceptional. Lorenzo the Magnificent would orate in the Platonic Academy of Florence on virtue and chastity, while maintaining multiple relations with ladies, married and unmarried, of his Court. He would turn from a poem in honour of the Virgin to salacious carnival songs that would be sung at his orgies.

If his four predecessors kept Rodrigo de Borja as their Vice-Chancellor, it was because he could not easily be replaced. It was he who transacted the most delicate business of the Church, and his policies kept enhancing the Pope's temporal power. He lost no influence at the Vatican on the death of his uncle. While the Roman mobs were pillaging such valuables as had survived the destruction of his palace,